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THE BUST OF GENIUS

The famous American sculptor, Jo Davidson, is responsible for this fine portrait bust of Anatole France, done in his wise, kindly, sane, old age. Behind the wrinkles of the flesh the unwearied spirit can be seen—strong, serene, playful—the man of genius to the last.

A MUMMER'S TALE

BY ANATOLE FRANCE

A TRANSLATION BY
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CHAPTER I

HE scene was an actress's dressing-room at the Odéon.

Félicie Nanteuil, her hair powdered, with blue on her eyelids, rouge on her cheeks and ears, and white on her neck and shoulders, was holding out her foot to Madame Michon, the dresser, who was fitting on a pair of little black slippers with red heels. Dr. Trublet, the physician attached to the theatre, and a friend of the actress's, was resting his bald cranium on a cushion of the divan, his hands folded upon his stomach and his short legs crossed.

"What else, my dear?" he inquired of her.

"Oh, I don't know! Fits of suffocation; giddiness; and, all of a sudden, an agonizing pain, as if I were going to die. That's the worst of all."

"Do you sometimes feel as though you must laugh or cry for no apparent reason, about nothing at all?"

"That I cannot tell you, for in this life one has so many reasons for laughing or crying!"

"Are you subject to attacks of dizziness?"

"No. But, just think, doctor, at night, I see an imaginary cat, under the chairs or the table, gazing at me with fiery eyes!"

"Try not to dream of cats any more," said Madame Michon, "because that's a bad omen. To see a cat is a sign that you'll be betrayed by friends, or deceived by a woman."

"But it is not in my dreams that I see a cat! It's when I'm wide awake!"

Trublet, who was in attendance at the Odéon once a month only, was given to looking in as a friend almost every evening. He was fond of the actresses, delighted in chatting with them, gave them good advice, and listened with delicacy to their confidences. He promised Félicie that he would write her a prescription at once.

"We'll attend to the stomach, my dear child, and you'll see no more cats under the chairs and tables."

Madame Michon was adjusting the actress's stays. The doctor, suddenly gloomy, watched her tugging at the laces.

"Don't scowl," said Félicie. "I am never tight-laced. With my waist I should surely be a fool if I were." And she added, thinking of her

best friend in the theatre, "It's all very well for Fagette, who has no shoulders and no hips; she's simply straight up and down. Michon, you can pull a little tighter still. I know you are no lover of waists, doctor. Nevertheless, I cannot wear swaddling bands like those æsthetic creatures. Just slip your hand into my stays, and you'll see that I don't squeeze myself too tight."

He denied that he was inimical to stays; he only condemned them when too tightly laced. He deplored the fact that women should have no sense of the harmony of line; that they should associate with smallness of the waist an idea of grace and beauty, not realizing that their beauty resided wholly in those modulations through which the body, having displayed the superb expansion of chest and bosom, tapers off gradually below the thorax, to glorify itself in the calm and generous width of the flanks.

"The waist," he said, "the waist, since one has to make use of that hideous word, should be a gradual, imperceptible, gentle transition from one to another of woman's two glories, her bosom and her womb, and you stupidly strangle it, you stave in the thorax, which involves the breasts in its ruin, you flatten your lower ribs, and you plough a horrible furrow above the navel. The negresses, who file their teeth down to a point, and split their lips, in order to insert a wooden disc, disfigure them-

selves in a less barbarous fashion. For, after all, some feminine splendour still remains to a creature who wears rings in the cartilage of her nose, and whose lip is distended by a circular disc of mahogany as big as this pomade pot. But the devastation is complete when woman carries her ravages into the sacred centre of her empire."

Dwelling upon a favourite subject, he enumerated one by one the deformities of the bones and muscles caused by the wearing of stays, in terms now fanciful, now precise, now droll, now lugubrious.

Nanteuil laughed as she listened. She laughed because, being a woman, she felt an inclination to laugh at physical uncomeliness or poverty; because, referring everything to her own little world of actors and actresses, each and every deformity described by the doctor reminded her of some comrade of the boards, stamping itself on her mind like a caricature. Knowing that she herself had a good figure, she delighted in her own young body as she pictured to herself all these indignities of the flesh. With a ringing laugh she crossed the dressing-room towards the doctor, dragging with her Madame Michon, who was holding on to her stay-laces as though they were reins, with the look of a sorceress being whisked away to a witchess' sabbath.

"Don't be afraid !" she said.

And she objected that peasant women, who

never wore stays, had far worse figures than town-bred women.

The doctor bitterly inveighed against the Western civilizations because of their contempt for and ignorance of natural beauty.

Trublet, born within the shadow of Saint-Sulpice, had gone as a young man to practise in Cairo. He brought back from that city a little money, a liver complaint, and a knowledge of the various customs of humanity. When, at a ripe age, he returned to his own country, he rarely strayed from his ancient Rue de Seine, thoroughly enjoying his life, save that it depressed him a trifle to see how little able his contemporaries were to realize the deplorable misunderstandings which for eighteen centuries had kept humanity at cross-purposes with nature.

There was a tap at the door.

"It's only me!" exclaimed a woman's voice in the passage.

Félicie, slipping on her pink petticoat, begged the doctor to open the door.

Enter Madame Doulce, a lady who was allowing her massive person to run to seed, although she had long contrived to hold it together on the boards, compelling it to assume the dignity proper to aristocratic mothers.

"Well, my dear! How-d'ye-do, doctor!

Félicie, you know I am not one to pay compliments. Nevertheless, I saw you the day before yesterday, and I assure you that in the second of *La Mère confidente* you put in some excellent touches, which are far from easy to bring off."

Nanteuil, with smiling eyes, waited—as is always the case when one has received a compliment—for another.

Madame Doulce, thus invited by Nanteuil's silence, murmured some additional words of praise:

". . . excellent touches, genuinely individual business!"

"You really think so, Madame Doulce? Glad to hear it, for I don't feel the part. And then that great Perrin woman upsets me altogether. It is a fact. When I sit on the creature's knees, it makes me feel as if—— You don't know all the horrors that she whispers into my ear while we are on the stage! She's crazy! I understand everything, but there are some things which disgust me. Michon, don't my stays crease at the back, on the right?"

"My dear child," cried Trublet with enthusiasm, "you have just said something that is really admirable."

"What?" inquired Nanteuil simply.

"You said: 'I understand everything, but there are some things which disgust me.' You understand everything; the thoughts and actions of men

appear to you as particular instances of the universal mechanics, but in respect of them you cherish neither hatred nor anger. But there are things which disgust you; you have a fastidious taste, and it is profoundly true that morals are a matter of taste. My child, I could wish that the Academy of Moral Science thought as sanely as you. Yes. You are quite right. As regards the instincts which you attribute to your fellow-actress, it is as futile to blame her for them as to blame lactic acid for being an acid possessing mixed properties."

"What are you talking about?"

"I am saying that we can no longer assign praise or blame to any human thought or action, once the inevitable nature of such thoughts and actions has been proved for us."

"So you approve of the morals of that gawk of a Perrin, do you? You, a member of the Legion of Honour! A nice thing, to be sure!"

The doctor heaved himself up.

"My child," he said, "give me a moment's attention; I am going to tell you an instructive story:

"In times gone by, human nature was other than it is to-day. There were then not men and women only, but also hermaphrodites; in other words, beings in whom the two sexes were combined. These three kinds of human beings possessed four arms, four legs, and two faces. They

were robust and rotated rapidly on their own axes, just like wheels. Their strength inspired them with audacity to war with the gods, therein following the example of the Giants. Jupiter, unable to brook such insolence——"

"Michon, doesn't my petticoat hang too low on the left?" asked Nanteuil.

"Resolved," continued the doctor, "to render them less strong and less daring. He divided each into two, so that they had now but two arms, two legs, and one head apiece, and thenceforward the human race became what it is to-day. Consequently, each of us is only the half of a human being, divided from the other half, just as one divides a sole into two portions. These halves are ever seeking their other halves. The love which we experience for one another is nothing but an invisible force impelling us to reunite our two halves in order to re-establish ourselves in our pristine perfection. Those men who result from the divisions of hermaphrodites love women; those women who have a similar origin love men. But the women who proceed from the division of primitive women do not bestow much attention upon men, but are drawn toward their own sex. So do not be astonished when you see——"

"Did you invent that precious story, doctor?" inquired Nanteuil, pinning a rose in her bodice.

The doctor protested that he had not invented a word of it. On the contrary, he had, he said, left out part of the story.

"So much the better!" exclaimed Nanteuil. "For I must tell you that the person who did invent it is not particularly brilliant."

"He is dead," remarked Trublet.

Nanteuil once more expressed her disgust of her fellow-actress, but Madame Doulce, who was prudent and occasionally took *déjeuner* with Jeanne Perrin, changed the subject.

"Well, my darling, so you've got the part of Angélique. Only remember what I told you: your gestures should be somewhat restrained, and you yourself a little stiff. That is the secret of the *ingénue*. Beware of your charming natural suppleness. Young girls in a 'stock' piece ought to be just a trifle doll-like. It's good form. The costume requires it. You see, Félicie, what you must do above all, when you are playing in *La Mère confidente,* which is a delightful play——"

"Oh," interrupted Félicie, "so long as I have a good part, I don't care a fig for the play. Besides, I am not particularly in love with Marivaux—— What are you laughing at, doctor? Have I put my foot in it? Isn't *La Mère confidente* by Marivaux?"

"To be sure it is!"

"Well, then? You are always trying to muddle me. I was saying that Angélique gets on my nerves. I should prefer a part with more meat in it, something out of the ordinary. This evening, especially, the part gives me the creeps."

"All the more likely that you'll do well in it, my pet," said Madame Doulce. "We never enter more thoroughly into our parts than when we do so by main force, and in spite of ourselves. I could give you many examples. I myself, in *La Vivandière d'Austerlitz,* staggered the house by my gaiety of tone, when I had just been informed that my Doulce, so great an artist and so good a husband, had had an epileptic fit in the orchestra at the Odéon, just as he was picking up his cornet."

"Why do they insist on my being nothing but an *ingénue?*" inquired Nanteuil, who wanted to play the woman in love, the brilliant coquette, and every part a woman could play.

"That is quite natural," persisted Madame Doulce. "Comedy is an imitative art; and you imitate in art all the better for not feeling it yourself."

"Do not delude yourself, my child," said the doctor to Félicie. "Once an *ingénue,* always an *ingénue.* You are born an Angélique or a Dorine, a Célimène or a Madame Pernelle. On the stage, some women are always twenty, others are always

thirty, others again are always sixty. As for you, Mademoiselle Nanteuil, you will always be eighteen, and you will always be an *ingénue*."

"I am quite content with my work," replied Nanteuil, "but you cannot expect me to play all *ingénues* with the same pleasure. There is one part, for example, which I long to play, and that is Agnès in *L'École des femmes*."

At the mere mention of the name of Agnès, the doctor murmured delightedly from among his cushions:

"Mes yeux ont-ils du mal pour en donner au monde?"

"Agnès, that's a part if you like!" exclaimed Nanteuil. "I have asked Pradel to give it me."

Pradel, the manager of the theatre, was an ex-comedian, a wideawake, genial fellow, who had got rid of his illusions and nourished no exaggerated hopes. He loved peace, books and women. Nanteuil had every reason to speak well of Pradel, and she referred to him without any feeling of ill will, and with frank directness.

"It was shameful, disgusting, rotten of him," she said. "He wouldn't let me play Agnès and gave the part to Falempin. I must say, though, that when I asked him I didn't go the right way about it. While she knows how to tackle him, if you like! But what do I care! If Pradel doesn't let

me play Agnès, he can go to the deuce, and his dirty Punch and Judy show too!"

Madame Doulce continued to lavish her unheeded precepts. She was an actress of merit, but she was old and worn out, and no longer obtained any engagements. She gave advice to beginners, wrote their letters for them, and thus, in the morning or evening, earned what was almost every day her only meal.

"Doctor," asked Félicie, while Madame Michon was fastening a black velvet ribbon around her neck: "You say that my fits of dizziness are due to my stomach. Are you sure of that?"

Before Trublet could answer, Madame Doulce exclaimed that fits of dizziness always proceeded from the stomach, and that two or three hours after meals she experienced a feeling of distention in hers, and she thereupon asked the doctor for a remedy.

Félicie, however, was thinking, for she was capable of thought.

"Doctor," she said suddenly, "I want to ask you a question, which you may possibly think a droll one; but I do really want to know whether, considering that you know just what there is in the human body, and that you have seen all the things we have inside us, it doesn't embarrass you, at certain moments, in your dealings with women?

It seems to me that the idea of all that must disgust you."

From the depths of his cushions Trublet, wafting a kiss to Félicie, replied:

"My dear child, there is no more exquisitely delicate, rich, and beautiful tissue than the skin of a pretty woman. That is what I was telling myself just now, while contemplating the back of your neck, and you will readily understand that, under such an impression——"

She made a grimace at him like that of a disdainful monkey.

"You think it witty, I suppose, to talk nonsense when anyone asks you a serious question?"

"Well, then, since you wish it, mademoiselle, you shall have an instructive answer. Some twenty years ago we had, in a post-mortem room at the Hôpital Saint-Joseph, a drunken old watchman, named Daddy Rousseau, who every day at eleven o'clock used to lunch at the end of the table on which the corpse was lying. He ate his lunch because he was hungry. Nothing prevents people who are hungry from eating as soon as they have got something to eat. Only Daddy Rousseau used to say: 'I don't know whether it is because of the atmosphere of the room, but I must have something fresh and appetizing.' "

"I understand," said Félicie. "Little flower-girls are what you want. But you mustn't, you know. And there you are seated like a Turk and you haven't written out my prescription yet." She cast an inquiring glance at him. "Where is the stomach exactly?"

The door had remained ajar. A young man, a very pretty fellow and extremely fashionable, pushed it open, and, having taken a couple of steps into the dressing-room, inquired politely whether he might come in.

"Oh, it's you!" said Nanteuil. And she stretched out her hand, which he kissed with pleasure, ceremony and fatuity.

"How are you, Doctor Socrates?" he inquired, without wasting any particular courtesies on Madame Doulce.

Trublet was often accosted in this manner, because of his snub-nose and his subtle speech. Pointing to Nanteuil, he said:

"Monsieur de Ligny, you see before you a young lady who is not quite sure whether she has a stomach. It is a serious question. We advise her to refer, for the answer, to the little girl who ate too much jam. Her mother said to her: 'You will injure your stomach.' The child replied: 'It's only ladies who have stomachs; little girls haven't any.' "

"Heavens, how silly you are, doctor!" cried Nanteuil.

"I would you spoke the truth, mademoiselle. Silliness is the capacity for happiness. It is the sovereign content. It is the prime asset in a civilized society."

"You are paradoxical, my dear doctor," remarked Monsieur de Ligny. "But I grant you that it is better to be silly as everybody is silly than to be clever as no one else is clever."

"It's true, what Robert says!" exclaimed Nanteuil, sincerely impressed. And she added thoughtfully: "At any rate, doctor, one thing is certain. It is that stupidity often prevents one from doing stupid things. I have noticed that many a time. Whether you take men or women, those are not the most stupid who act the most stupidly. For example, there are intelligent women who are stupid about men."

"You mean those who cannot do without them."

"There's no hiding anything from you, my little Socrates."

"Ah," sighed the big Doulce, "what a terrible slavery it is! Every woman who cannot control her senses is lost to art."

Nanteuil shrugged her pretty shoulders, which still retained something of the angularity of youth.

"Oh, my great-grandmother! Don't try to

kid the youngsters! What an idea! In your days, did actresses control their—how did you put it? Fiddlesticks! They didn't control them a scrap!"

Noticing that Nanteuil's temper was rising, the bulky Doulce retired with dignity and prudence. Once in the passage, she vouchsafed a further word of advice:

"Remember, my darling, to play Angélique as a 'bud.' The part requires it."

But Nanteuil, her nerves on edge, took no notice.

"Really," she said, sitting down before her dressing-table, "she makes me boil, that old Doulce, with her morality. Does she think people have forgotten her adventures? If so, she is mistaken. Madame Ravaud tells one of them six days out of seven. Everybody knows that she reduced her husband, the musician, to such a state of exhaustion that one night he tumbled into his cornet. As for her lovers, magnificent men, just ask Madame Michon. Why, in less than two years she made mere shadows of them, mere puffs of breath. That's the way she controlled them! And supposing anyone had told her that she was lost to art!"

Dr. Trublet extended his two hands, palms outward, towards Nanteuil, as though to stop her.

"Do not excite yourself, my child. Madame

Doulce is sincere. She used to love men, now she loves God. One loves what one can, as one can, and with what one has. She has become chaste and pious at the fitting age. She is diligent in the practices of her religion: she goes to Mass on Sundays and feast days, she——"

"Well, she is right to go to Mass," asserted Nanteuil. "Michon, light a candle for me, to heat my rouge. I must do my lips again. Certainly, she is quite right to go to Mass, but religion does not forbid one to have a lover."

"You think not?" asked the doctor.

"I know my religion better than you, that's certain!"

A lugubrious bell sounded, and the mournful voice of the call-boy was heard in the corridors:

"The curtain-raiser is over!"

Nanteuil rose, and slipped over her wrist a velvet ribbon ornamented with a steel medallion. Madame Michon was on her knees arranging the three Watteau pleats of the pink dress, and, with her mouth full of pins, delivered herself from one corner of her lips of the following maxim:

"There is one good thing in being old, men cannot make you suffer any more."

Robert de Ligny took a cigarette from his case.

"May I?" And he moved toward the lighted candle on the dressing table.

Nanteuil, who never took her eyes off him, saw beneath his moustache, red and light as flame, his lips, ruddy in the candlelight, drawing in and puffing out the smoke. She felt a slight warmth in her ears. Pretending to look among her trinkets, she grazed Ligny's neck with her lips, and whispered to him:

"Wait for me after the show, in a cab, at the corner of the Rue de Tournon."

At this moment the sound of voices and footsteps was heard in the corridor. The actors in the curtain-raiser were returning to their dressing-rooms.

"Doctor, pass me your newspaper."

"It is highly uninteresting, mademoiselle."

"Never mind, pass it over."

She took it and held it like a screen above her head.

"The light makes my eyes ache," she observed.

It was true that a too brilliant light would sometimes give her a headache. But she had just seen herself in the glass. With her blue-tinted eyelids, her eyelashes smeared with a black paste, her grease-painted cheeks, her lips tinted red in the shape of a tiny heart, it seemed to her she looked like a painted corpse with glass eyes, and she did not wish Ligny to see her thus.

While she was keeping her face in the shadow of the newspaper a tall, lean young man entered the

dressing-room with a swaggering gait. His melancholy eyes were deeply sunken above a nose like a crow's beak; his mouth was set in a petrified grin. The Adam's apple of his long throat made a deep shadow on his stock. He was dressed as a stage bailiff.

"That you, Chevalier? How are you, my friend?" gaily inquired Dr. Trublet, who was fond of actors, preferred the bad ones, and had a special liking for Chevalier.

"Come in, everybody!" cried Nanteuil. "This isn't a dressing-room; it's a mill."

"My respects, none the less, Mme. Miller!" replied Chevalier. "I warn you, there's a pack of idiots out in front. Would you believe it—they shut me up!"

"That's no reason for walking in without knocking," replied Nanteuil snappishly.

The doctor pointed out that Monsieur de Ligny had left the door open; whereupon Nanteuil, turning to Ligny, said in a tone of tender reproach:

"Did you really leave the door open? But, when one comes into a room, one closes the door on other people: it is one of the first things one is taught."

She wrapped herself in a white blanket-cloak.

The call-boy summoned the players to the stage.

She grasped the hand which Ligny offered her, and, exploring his wrist with her fingers, dug her nail into the spot, close to the veins, where the skin is tender. Then she disappeared into the dark corridor.

CHAPTER II

HEVALIER, having resumed his ordinary clothes, sat in a corner box, beside Madame Doulce, gazing at Félicie, a small remote figure on the stage. And remembering the days when he had held her in his arms, in his attic in the Rue des Martyrs, he wept with grief and rage.

They had met last year at a fête given under the patronage of Lecureuil, the deputy; a benefit performance given in aid of poor actors of the ninth *arrondissement.* He had prowled around her, dumb, famishing, and with blazing eyes. For a whole fortnight he had pursued her incessantly. Cold and unmoved, she had appeared to ignore him. Then, suddenly, she surrendered; so suddenly that when he left her that day, still radiant and amazed, he had said a stupid thing. He had told her: "And I took you for a little bit of china!" For three whole months he had tasted joys acute as pain. Then Félicie had grown elusive, remote, and estranged. She loved him no longer. He sought the reason, but could not discover it. It tortured him

to know that he was no longer loved; jealousy tortured him still more. It was true that in the first beautiful hours of his love he had known that Félicie had a lover, one Girmandel, a court bailiff, who lived in the Rue de Provence, and he had felt it deeply. But as he never saw him he had formed so confused and ill-defined an idea of him that his jealousy lost itself in uncertainty. Félicie assured him that she had never been more than passive in her intercourse with Girmandel, that she had not even pretended to care for him. He believed her, and this belief gave him the keenest satisfaction. She also told him that for a long time past, for months, Girmandel had been nothing more than a friend, and he believed her. In short, he was deceiving the bailiff, and it was agreeable to him to feel that he enjoyed this advantage. He had learned also that Félicie, who was just finishing her second year at the Conservatoire, had not denied herself to her professor. But the grief which he had felt because of this was softened by a time-honoured and venerable custom. Now Robert de Ligny was causing him intolerable suffering. For some time past he had found him incessantly dangling about her. He could not doubt that she loved Robert; and although he sometimes told himself that she had not yet given herself to this man, it was not that he believed it, but merely that

he was fain sometimes to mitigate the bitterness of his sufferings.

Mechanical applause broke out at the back of the theatre, and a few members of the orchestra, murmuring inaudibly, clapped their hands slowly and noislessly. Nanteuil had just given her last reply to Jeanne Perrin.

"*Brava! Brava!* She is delightful, dear little woman!" sighed Madame Doulce.

In his jealous anger, Chevalier was disloyal. Lifting a finger to his forehead, he remarked:

"She plays with *that.*" Then, placing his hand upon his heart, he added: "It is with this that one should act."

"Thanks, dear friend, thanks!" murmured Madame Doulce, who read into these maxims an obvious eulogy of herself.

She was, indeed, in the habit of asserting that all good acting comes from the heart; she maintained that, to give full expression to a passion, it was necessary to experience it, and to feel in one's own person the expressions that one wished to represent. She was fond of referring to herself as an example of this. When appearing as a tragedy queen, after draining a goblet of poison on the stage, her bowels had been on fire all night. Nevertheless she was given to saying: "The dramatic art is an imitative art, and one imitates an emotion all

the better for not having experienced it." And to illustrate this maxim she drew yet further examples from her triumphant career.

She gave a deep sigh.

"The child is admirably gifted. But she is to be pitied; she has been born into a bad period. There is no longer a public nowadays; no critics, no plays, no theatres, no artists. It is a decadence of art."

Chevalier shook his head.

"No need to pity her," he said. "She will have all that she can wish; she will succeed; she will be wealthy. She is a selfish little jade, and a woman who is selfish can get anything she likes. But for people with hearts there's nothing left but to hang a stone around one's neck and throw oneself into the river. But, I too, I shall go far. I, too, shall climb high. I, too, will be a selfish hound."

He got up and went out without waiting for the end of the play. He did not return to Félicie's dressing-room for fear of meeting Ligny there, the sight of whom was insupportable, and because by avoiding it he could pretend to himself that Ligny had not returned thither.

Conscious of physical distress on going away from her, he took five or six turns under the dark, deserted arcades of the Odéon, went down the steps into the night, and turned up the Rue de

Médicis. Coachmen were dozing on their boxes, while waiting for the end of the performance, and high over the tops of the plane-trees the moon was racing through the clouds. Treasuring in his heart an absurd yet soothing remnant of hope, he went, this night, as on other nights, to wait for Félicie at her mother's flat.

CHAPTER III

ADAME NANTEUIL lived with her daughter in a little flat on the fifth story of a house in the Boulevard Saint-Michel, whose windows opened upon the garden of the Luxembourg. She gave Chevalier a friendly welcome, for she thought kindly of him because he loved Félicie, and because the latter did not love him in return, and ignored on principle the fact that he had been her daughter's lover.

She made him sit beside her in the dining-room, where a coke fire was burning in the stove. In the lamplight army revolvers and sabres with golden tassels on the sword-knots gleamed upon the wall. They were hung about a woman's cuirass, which was provided with round breast-shields of tin-plate; a piece of armour which Félicie had worn last winter, while still a pupil at the Conservatoire, when taking the part of Joan of Arc at the house of a spiritualistic duchess. An officer's widow and the mother of an actress, Madame Nanteuil, whose real name was Nantean, treasured these trophies.

"Félicie is not back yet, Monsieur Chevalier. I don't expect her before midnight. She is on the stage till the end of the play."

"I know; I was in the first piece. I left the theatre after the first act of *La Mère confidente.*"

"Oh, Monsieur Chevalier, why didn't you stay till the end? My daughter would have been so pleased if you had waited. When one is acting, one likes to have friends in the house."

Chevalier replied ambiguously:

"Oh, as to friends, there are plenty of those about."

"You are mistaken, Monsieur Chevalier; good friends are scarce. Madame Doulce was there, of course? Was she pleased with Félicie?" And she added, with great humility: "I should indeed be happy if she could really make a hit. It is so difficult to come to the fore in her profession, for a girl who is alone, without support, without influence! And it is so necessary for her to succeed, poor child!"

Chevalier did not feel disposed to lavish any pity upon Félicie. With a shrug of the shoulders he replied bluntly:

"No need to worry about that. She'll get on. She is an actress heart and soul. She has it in her bones, down to her very legs."

Madame Nanteuil indulged in a quiet smile.

"Poor child! They are not very plump, her legs. Félicie's health is not bad, but she must not overdo it. She often has fits of giddiness, and sick headaches."

The servant came in to place on the table a dish of fried sausage, a bottle of wine, and a few plates.

Meanwhile, Chevalier was searching in his mind for some appropriate fashion of asking a question which had been on the tip of his tongue ever since he had set foot on the stairs. He wanted to know whether Félicie was still meeting Girmandel, whose name he never heard mentioned nowadays. We are given to conceiving desires which suit themselves to our condition. Now, in the misery of his existence, in the distress of his heart, he was full of an eager desire that Félicie, who loved him no longer, should love Girmandel, whom she loved but little, and he hoped with all his heart that Girmandel would keep her for him, would possess her wholly, and leave nothing of her for Robert de Ligny. The idea that the girl might be with Girmandel appeased his jealously, and he dreaded to learn that she had broken with him.

Of course he would never have allowed himself to question a mother as to her daughter's lovers. But it was permissible to speak of Girmandel to Madame Nanteuil, who saw nothing that was other

than respectable in the relations of her household with the Government official, who was well-to-do, married, and the father of two charming daughters. To bring Girmandel's name into the conversation he had only to resort to a stratagem. Chevalier hit upon one which he thought was ingenious.

"By the way," he remarked, "I saw Girmandel just now in a carriage."

Madame Nanteuil made no comment.

"He was driving down the Boulevard Saint-Michel in a cab. I certainly thought I recognized him. I should be greatly surprised if it wasn't he."

Madame Nanteuil made no comment.

"His fair beard, his high colour—he's an easy man to recognize, Girmandel."

Madame Nanteuil made no comment.

"You were very friendly with him at one time, you and Félicie. Do you still see him?"

"Monsieur Girmandel? Oh yes, we still see him," replied Madame Nanteuil softly.

These words made Chevalier feel almost happy. But she had deceived him; she had not spoken the truth. She had lied out of self-respect, and in order not to reveal a domestic secret which she regarded as derogatory to the honour of her family. The truth was that, being carried away by her passion for Ligny, Félicie had given Girmandel the go-by, and he, being a man of the world, had promptly cut

off supplies. Madame Nanteuil, despite her years, had resumed an old lover, out of her love for her child, that she might not want for anything. She had renewed her former liaison with Tony Meyer, the picture-dealer in the Rue de Clinchy. Tony Meyer was a poor substitute for Girmandel; he was none too free with his money. Madame Nanteuil, who was wise and knew the value of things, did not complain on that account, and she was rewarded for her devotion, for, in the six weeks during which she had been loved anew, she had grown young again.

Chevalier, following up his idea, inquired:

"You would hardly say that Girmandel was still a young man, would you?"

"He is not old," said Madame Nanteuil. "A man is not old at forty."

"A bit used up, isn't he?"

"Oh, dear no," replied Madame Nanteuil, quite calmly.

Chevalier became thoughtful and was silent. Madame Nanteuil began to nod. Then, being aroused from her somnolence by the servant, who brought in the salt-cellar and the water-bottle, she inquired:

"And you, Monsieur Chevalier, is all well with you?"

No, all was not well with him. The critics were

out to "down" him. And the proof that they had combined against him was that they all said the same thing; they said his face lacked expression.

"My face lacking in expression!" he cried indignantly. "They should have called it a predestined face. Madame Nanteuil, I aim high, and it is that which does me harm. For example, in *La Nuit du 23 octobre,* which is being rehearsed now, I am Florentin: I have only six lines; it's a wash-out. But I have increased the importance of the character enormously. Durville is furious. He deliberately crabs all my effects."

Madame Nanteuil, placid and kindly, found words to comfort him. Obstacles were there, no doubt, but in the end one overcame them. Her own daughter had fallen foul of the ill-will of certain critics.

"Half-past twelve!" said Chevalier gloomily. "Félicie is late."

Madame Nanteuil supposed that she had been detained by Madame Doulce.

"Madame Doulce as a rule undertakes to see her home, and you know she never hurries herself."

Chevalier rose, as if to take his leave, to show that he remembered his manners. Madame Nanteuil begged him to stay.

"Don't go; Félicie won't be long now. She

will be pleased to find you here. You will have supper with her."

Madame Nanteuil dozed off again in her chair. Chevalier sat gazing in silence at the clock hanging on the wall, and as the hand travelled across the dial he felt a burning wound in his heart, which grew bigger and bigger, and each little stroke of the pendulum touched him to the quick, lending a keener eye to his jealousy, by recording the moments which Félicie was passing with Ligny. For he was now convinced that they were together. The stillness of the night, interrupted only by the muffled sounds of the cabs bowling along the boulevard, gave reality to the thoughts and images which tortured him. He could see them.

Awakened with a start by the sound of singing on the pavement below, Madame Nanteuil returned to the thought with which she had fallen to sleep.

"That's what I am always telling Félicie: one mustn't be discouraged. One should not lose heart. We all have our ups and downs in life."

Chevalier nodded acquiescence.

"But those who suffer," he said, "only get what they deserve. It needs but a moment to free oneself from all one's troubles. Isn't it so?"

She admitted the fact; certainly there were such things as sudden opportunities, especially on the stage.

"Heaven knows," he continued in a deep, brooding voice, "it's not the stage I am worrying about. I know I shall make a name for myself one day, and a big one. But what's the good of being a great artist if one isn't happy? There are stupid worries which are terrible! Pains that throb in your temples with strokes as even and as regular as the ticking of that clock, till they drive you mad!"

He ceased speaking; the gloomy gaze of his deep-set eyes fell upon the trophy hanging on the wall. Then he continued:

"These stupid worries, these ridiculous sufferings, if one endures them too long, it simply means that one is a coward."

And he felt the butt of the revolver which he always carried in his pocket.

Madame Nanteuil listened to him serenely, with the gentle determination not to know anything, which had been her one talent in life.

"Another dreadful thing," she observed, "is to decide what to have to eat. Félicie is sick of everything. There's no knowing what to get for her."

After that, the flagging conversation languished, drawn out into detached phrases, which had no particular meaning. Madame Nanteuil, the servant, the coke fire, the lamp, the plate of sausage, awaited Félicie in depressing silence. The clock struck one.

Chevalier's suffering had by this time attained the serenity of a flood tide. He was now certain. The cabs were not so frequent and their wheels echoed more loudly along the street. The rumbling of one of these cabs suddenly ceased outside the house. A few seconds later he heard the slight grating of a key in the lock, the slamming of the door, and light footsteps in the outer room.

The clock marked twenty-three minutes past one. He was suddenly full of agitation, yet hopeful. She had come! Who could tell what she would say? She might offer the most natural explanation of her late arrival.

Félicie entered the room, her hair in disorder, her eyes shining, her cheeks white, her bruised lips a vivid red; she was tired, indifferent, mute, happy and lovely, seeming to guard beneath her cloak, which she held wrapped about her with both hands, some remnant of warmth and voluptuous pleasure.

"I was beginning to be worried," said her mother. "Aren't you going to unfasten your cloak?"

"I'm hungry," she replied. She dropped into a chair before the little round table. Throwing her cloak over the back of the chair, she revealed her slender figure in its little black schoolgirl's dress, and, resting her left elbow on the oil-cloth table-cover, she proceeded to stick her fork into the sliced sausage.

"Did everything go off well to-night?" asked Madame Nanteuil.

"Quite well."

"You see, Chevalier has come to keep you company. It is kind of him, isn't it?"

"Oh, Chevalier! Well, let him come to the table."

And, without replying further to her mother's questions, she began to eat, greedy and charming, like Ceres in the old woman's house. Then she pushed aside her plate, and leaning back in her chair, with half-closed eyes, and parted lips, she smiled a smile that was akin to a kiss.

Madame Nanteuil, having drunk her glass of mulled wine, rose to her feet.

"You will excuse me, Monsieur Chevalier, I have my accounts to bring up to date."

This was the formula which she usually employed to announce that she was going to bed.

Left alone with Félicie, Chevalier said to her angrily:

"I know I'm a fool and a groveller; but I'm going mad for love of you. Do you hear, Félicie?"

"I should think I do hear. You needn't shout like that!"

"It's ridiculous, isn't it?"

"No, it's not ridiculous, it's——"

She did not complete the sentence.

He drew nearer to her, dragging his chair with him.

"You came in at twenty-five minutes past one. It was Ligny who saw you home, I know it. He brought you back in a cab; I heard it stop outside the house."

As she did not reply, he continued:

"Deny it, if you can!"

She remained silent, and he repeated, in an urgent, almost appealing tone:

"Tell me he didn't!"

Had she been so inclined, she might, with a phrase, with a single word, with a tiny movement of head or shoulders, have rendered him perfectly submissive, and almost happy. But she maintained a malicious silence. With compressed lips and a far-off look in her eyes, she seemed as though lost in a dream.

He sighed hoarsely.

"Fool that I was, I didn't think of that! I told myself that you would come home, as on other nights, with Madame Doulce, or else alone. If I had only known that you were going to let that fellow see you home!"

"Well, what would you have done, had you known it?"

"I should have followed you, by God!"

She stared at him with hard, unnaturally bright eyes.

"That I forbid you to do! Understand me! If I learn that you have followed me, even once, I'll never see you again. To begin with, you haven't the right to follow me. I suppose I am free to do as I like."

Choking with astonishment and anger, he stammered:

"Haven't the right to? Haven't the right to? You tell me I haven't the right?"

"No, you haven't the right! Moreover, I won't have it." Her face assumed an expression of disgust. "It's a mean trick to spy on a woman. If you once try to find out where I'm going, I'll send you about your business, and quickly at that."

"Then," he murmured, thunderstruck, "we are nothing to each other, I am nothing to you. We have never belonged to each other. But see, Félicie, remember——"

But she was losing patience:

"Well, what do you want me to remember?"

"Félicie, remember that you gave yourself to me!"

"My dear boy, you really can't expect me to think of that all day. It wouldn't be proper."

He looked at her for a while, more in curiosity

than in anger, and said to her, half bitterly, half gently:

"They may well call you a selfish little jade! Be one, Félicie, be one, as much as you like! What does it matter, since I love you? You are mine; I am going to take you back; I am going to take you back, and keep you. Think! I can't go on suffering for ever, like a poor dumb beast. Listen. I'll start with a clean slate. Let us begin to love one another over again. And this time it will be all right. And you'll be mine for good, mine only. I am an honest man; you know that. You can depend on me. I'll marry you as soon as I've got a position."

She gazed at him with disdainful surprise. He believed that she had doubts as to his dramatic future, and, in order to banish them, he said, erect on his long legs:

"Don't you believe in my star, Félicie? You are wrong. I can feel that I am capable of creating great parts. Let them only give me a part, and they'll see. And I have in me not only comedy, but drama, tragedy—yes, tragedy. I can deliver verse properly. And that is a talent which is becoming rare in these days. So don't imagine, Félicie, that I am insulting you when I offer you marriage. Far from it! We will marry later on, as soon as it is possible and suitable. Of

course, there is no need for hurry. Meanwhile, we will resume our pleasant habits of the Rue des Martyrs. You remember, Félicie; we were so happy there! The bed wasn't wide, but we used to say: 'That doesn't matter.' I have now two fine rooms in the Rue de la Montagne-Saint-Geneviève, behind Saint-Étienne-du-Mont. Your portrait hangs on every wall. You will find there the little bed of the Rue des Martyrs. Listen to me, I beg of you: I have suffered too much; I will not suffer any longer. I demand that you shall be mine, mine only."

While he was speaking, Félicie had taken from the mantelpiece the pack of cards with which her mother played every night, and was spreading them out on the table.

"Mine only. You hear me, Félicie?"

"Don't disturb me, I am busy with a game of patience."

"Listen to me, Félicie. I won't have you receiving that fool in your dressing-room."

Looking at her cards she murmured:

"All the blacks are at the bottom of the pack."

"I say that fool. He is a diplomatist, and nowadays the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the refuge of incompetents." Raising his voice, he continued: "Félicie, for your own sake, as well as for mine, listen to me!"

"Well, don't shout, then. Mama is asleep."

He continued in muffled tones:

"Just get it into your head that I don't intend that Ligny shall be your lover."

She raised her spiteful little face, and replied:

"And if he is my lover?"

He moved a step closer to her, raising his chair, gazing at her with the eye of a madman, and laughing a cracked laugh.

"If he is your lover, he won't be so for long."

And he dropped the chair.

Now she was alarmed. She forced herself to smile.

"You know very well I'm joking!"

She succeeded without much difficulty in making him believe that she had spoken thus merely to punish him, because he was getting unbearable. He became calmer. She then informed him that she was tired out, that she was dropping with sleep. At last he decided to go home. On the landing he turned, and said:

"Félicie, I advise you, if you wish to avoid a tragedy, not to see Ligny again."

She cried through the half-open door:

"Knock on the window of the porter's lodge, so that he can let you out!"

CHAPTER IV

N the dark auditorium large linen sheets protected the balcony and the boxes. The orchestra was covered with a huge dust-cloth, which, being turned back at the edges, left room for a few human figures, indistinctly seen in the gloom: actors, scene-shifters, costumiers, friends of the manager, mothers and lovers and actresses. Here and there shone a pair of eyes from the black recesses of the boxes.

They were rehearsing, for the fifty-sixth time, *La Nuit du 23 octobre 1812*, a celebrated drama, dating twenty years back, which had not as yet been performed in this theatre. The actors knew their parts, and the following day had been chosen for that last private rehearsal which on stages less austere than that of the Odéon is known as "the dressmakers' rehearsal."

Nanteuil had no part in the play. But she had had business at the theatre that day, and, as she had been informed that Marie-Claire was execrable

in the part of General Malet's wife, she had come to have a peep at her, concealed in the depths of a box.

The great scene of the second act was about to begin. The stage setting represented an attic in the private asylum where the conspirator was confined in 1812. Durville, who filled the part of General Malet, had just made his entrance. He was rehearsing in costume: a long blue frock-coat, with a collar reaching above his ears, and riding-breeches of chamois leather. He had even gone so far as to make up his face for the part, the clean-shaven soldiery face of the general of the Empire, ornamented with the "hare's-foot" whiskers which were handed down by the victors of Austerlitz to their sons, the bourgeois of July. Standing erect, his right elbow resting in his left hand, his brow supported by his right hand, his deep voice and his tight-fitting breeches expressed his pride.

"Alone, and without funds, from the depths of a prison, to attack this colossus, who commands a million soldiers, and who causes all the peoples and kings of Europe to tremble. Well, this colossus shall fall crashing to the ground."

From the back of the stage old Maury, who was playing the conspirator Jacquemont, delivered his reply:

"He may crush us in his downfall."

Suddenly cries at once plaintive and angry arose from the orchestra.

The author was exploding. He was a man of seventy, brimming over with youth.

"What do I see there at the back of the stage? It's not an actor, it's a fire-place. We shall have to send for the bricklayers, the marble-workers, to move it. Maury, do get a move on, confound you!"

Maury shifted his position.

"He may crush us in his downfall. I realize that it will not be your fault, General. Your proclamation is excellent. You promise them a constitution, liberty, equality. It is Machiavellian."

Durville replied:

"And in the best sense. An incorrigible breed, they are making ready to violate the oaths that they have not yet taken, and, because they lie, they believe themselves Machiavellis. What will you do with absolute power, you simpletons?"

The strident voice of the author ground out:

"You are right off the track, Durville."

"I?" asked the astonished Durville.

"Yes, you, Durville, you do not understand a word of what you are saying."

In order to humiliate them, "to take them down a peg," this man who, in the whole course of

his life, had never forgotten the name of a dairy-woman or a hall-porter, disdained to remember the names of the most illustrious actors.

"Durville, my friend, just do that over again for me."

He could play every part well. Jovial, funereal, violent, tender, impetuous, affectionate, he assumed at will a deep or a piping voice; he sighed, he roared, he laughed, he wept. He could transform himself, like a man in the fairy-tale, into a flame, a river, a woman, a tiger.

In the wings the actors exchanged only short and meaningless phrases. Their freedom of speech, their easy morals, the familiarity of their manners did not prevent their retaining so much of hypocrisy as is needful, in any assemblage of men, if people are to look upon one another without feelings of horror and disgust. There even prevailed, in this work-shop in full activity, a seemly appearance of harmony and union, a oneness of feeling created by the thought, lofty or commonplace, of the author, a spirit of order which compelled all rivalries and all illwill to transform themselves into goodwill and harmonious co-operation.

Nanteuil, sitting in her box, felt uneasy at the thought that Chevalier was close at hand. For the last two days, since the night on which he had uttered his obscure threats, she had not seen him

again, and the fear with which he had inspired her still possessed her. Félicie, if you wish to prevent a tragedy, I advise you not to see Ligny again." What did those words portend? She pondered deeply over Chevalier. This young fellow, who, only two days earlier, had seemed to her commonplace and insignificant, of whom she had seen a good deal too much, whom she knew by heart—how mysterious and full of secrets he now appeared to her! How suddenly it had dawned upon her that she did not know him! Of what was he capable? She tried to guess. What was he going to do? Probably nothing. All men who are thrown over by a woman utter threats and do nothing. But was Chevalier a man quite like all the rest? People did say that he was crazy. That was mere talk. But she herself did not feel sure that there might not be a spark of insanity in him. She was studying him now with genuine interest. Highly intelligent herself, she had never discovered any great signs of intelligence in him; but he had on several occasions astonished her by the obstinacy of his will. She could remember his performing acts of the fiercest energy. Jealous by nature, there were yet certain matters which he understood. He knew what a woman is compelled to do in order to win a place on the stage, or to dress herself properly; but he could not

endure to be deceived for the sake of love. Was he the sort of man to commit a crime, to do something dreadful? That was what she could not decide. She recalled his mania for handling firearms. When she used to visit him in the Rue des Martyrs, she always found him in his room, taking an old shot-gun to pieces and cleaning it. And yet he never went shooting. He boasted of being a dead shot, and carried a revolver on his person. But what did that prove? Never before had she thought so much about him.

Nanteuil was tormenting herself in this fashion in her box, when Jenny Fagette came to join her there; Jenny Fagette, slender and fragile, the incarnation of Alfred de Musset's Muse, who at night wore out her eyes of periwinkle-blue by scribbling society notes and fashion articles. A mediocre actress, but a clever and wonderfully energetic woman, she was Nanteuil's most intimate friend. They recognized in each other remarkable qualities, qualities which differed from those which each discovered in herself, and they acted in concert as the two great Powers of the Odéon. Nevertheless, Fagette was doing her best to take Ligny away from her friend; not from inclination, for she was insensible as a stick and held men in contempt, but with the idea that a liaison with a diplomatist would procure her certain advantages, and above all, in order not to miss the opportunity of doing some-

thing scandalous. Nanteuil was aware of this. She knew that all her sister-actresses, Ellen Midi, Duvernet, Herschell, Falempin, Stella, Marie-Claire were trying to take Ligny from her. She had seen Louise Dalle, who dressed like a music-mistress, and always had the air of being about to storm an omnibus, and retained, even in her provocations and accidental contacts, the appearance of incurable respectability, pursue Ligny with her lanky legs, and beset him with the glances of a poverty-stricken Pasiphæ. She had also surprised the oldest actress of the theatre, their excellent mother Ravaud, in a corridor, baring at Ligny's approach, all that was left to her, her magnificent arms, which had been famous for forty years.

Fagette, with disgust, and the tip of a gloved finger, called Nanteuil's attention to the scene through which Durville, old Maury and Marie-Claire was struggling.

"Just look at those people. They look as if they were playing at the bottom of thirty fathoms of water."

"It's because the top lights are not lit."

"Not a bit of it. This theatre always looks as if it were at the bottom of the sea. And to think that I, too, in a moment, have to enter that aquarium. Nanteuil, you must not stop longer than one season in this theatre. One is drowned in it. But look at them, look at them!"

Durville was becoming almost ventriloqual in order to seem more solemn and more virile:

"Peace, the abolition of the combined martial and civil law, and of conscription, higher pay for the troops; in the absence of funds, a few drafts on the bank, a few commissions suitably distributed, these are infallible means."

Madame Doulce entered the box. Unfastening her cloak with its pathetic lining of old rabbit-skin, she produced a small dog's-eared book.

"They are Madame de Sévigné's letters," she said. "You know that next Sunday I am going to give a reading of the best of Madame de Sévigné's letters."

"Where?" asked Fagette.

"Salle Renard."

It must have been some remote and little known hall, for Nanteuil and Fagette had not heard of it.

"I am giving this reading for the benefit of the three poor orphans left by Lacour, the actor, who died so sadly of consumption this winter. I am counting on you, my darlings, to dispose of some tickets for me."

"All the same, she really is ridiculous, Marie-Claire!" said Nanteuil.

Some one scratched at the door of the box. It was Constantin Marc, the youthful author of a play,

La Grille, which the Odéon was going to rehearse immediately; and Constantin Marc, although a countryman living in the forest, could henceforth breathe only in the theatre. Nanteuil was to take the principal part in the play. He gazed upon her with emotion, as the precious amphora destined to be the receptacle of his thought.

Meanwhile Durville continued hoarsely:

"If our France can be saved only at the price of our life and honour, I shall say, with the man of '93: 'Perish our memory!' "

Fagette pointed her finger at a bloated youth, who was sitting in the orchestra, resting his chin on his walking-stick.

"Isn't that Baron Deutz?"

"Need you ask!" replied Nanteuil. "Ellen Midi is in the cast. She plays in the fourth act. Baron Deutz has come to display himself."

"Just wait a minute, my children; I have a word to say to that ill-mannered cub. He met me yesterday in the Place de la Concorde, and he didn't bow to me."

"What, Baron Deutz? He couldn't have seen you!"

"He saw me perfectly well. But he was with his people. I am going to have him on toast. Just you watch, my dears."

She called him very softly:

"Deutz! Deutz!"

The Baron came towards her, smiling and well-pleased with himself, and leaned his elbows on the edge of the box.

"Tell me, Monsieur Deutz, when you met me yesterday, were you in very bad company that you did not raise your hat to me?"

He looked at her in astonishment.

"I? I was with my sister."

"Oh!"

On the stage, Marie-Claire, hanging upon Durville's neck, was exclaiming:

"Go! Victorious or defeated, in good or evil fortune, your glory will be equally great. Come what may, I shall know how to show myself the wife of a hero."

"That will do, Madame Marie-Claire!" said Pradel.

Just at that moment Chevalier made his entry, and immediately the author, tearing his hair, let loose a flood of imprecations:

"Do you call that an entry? It's a tumble, a catastrophe, a cataclysm! Ye gods! A meteor, an aerolith, a bit of the moon falling on to the stage would be less horribly disastrous! I will take off my play! Chevalier, come in again, my good fellow!"

The artist who had designed the costumes,

Michel, a fair young man with a mystic beard, was seated in the first row, on the arm of a stall. He leaned over and whispered into the ear of Roger, the scene-painter:

"And to think it's the fifty-sixth time that he's dropped on Chevalier with the same fury!"

"Well, you know, Chevalier is rottenly bad," replied Roger, without hesitation.

"It isn't that he is bad," returned Michel indulgently. "But he always seems to be laughing, and nothing could be worse for a comedy actor. I knew him when he was quite a kid, at Montmartre. At school his masters used to ask him: 'Why are you laughing?' He was not laughing; he had no desire to laugh; he used to get his ears boxed from morning to night. His parents wanted to put him in a chemical factory. But he had dreams of the stage, and spent his days on the Butte Montmartre, in the studio of the painter Montalent. Montalent at that time was working day and night on his *Death of Saint Louis,* a huge picture which was commissioned for the cathedral of Carthage. One day, Montalent said to him——"

"A little less noise!" shouted Pradel.

"Said to him: 'Chevalier, since you have nothing to do, just sit for Philippe the Bold.' 'With pleasure,' said Chevalier. Montalent told him to assume the attitude of a man bowed down with

grief. More, he stuck two tears as big as spectacle lenses on his cheeks. He finished his picture, forwarded it to Carthage, and had half a dozen bottles of champagne sent up. Three months later he received from Father Cornemuse, the head of the French Missions in Tunis, a letter informing him that his painting of the *Death of Saint Louis,* having been submitted to the Cardinal-Archbishop, had been refused by His Eminence, because of the unseemly expression on the face of Philippe the Bold who was laughing as he watched the saintly King, his father, dying on a bed of straw. Montalent could not make head or tail of it; he was furious, and wanted to take proceedings against the Cardinal-Archbishop. His painting was returned to him; he unpacked it, gazed at it in gloomy silence and suddenly shouted: 'It's true—Philippe the Bold appears to be splitting his sides with laughter. What a fool I have been! I gave him the head of Chevalier, who always seems to be laughing, the brute!' "

"Will you be quiet there!" yelled Pradel.

And the author exclaimed:

"Pradel, my dear boy, just pitch all those people into the street."

Indefatigable, he was arranging the scene:

"A little farther, Trouville, there. Chevalier, you walk up to the table, you pick up the docu-

ments one by one, and you say: 'Senatus-Consultum. Order of the day. Despatches to the departments. Proclamation.' Do you understand?"

"Yes, Master. 'Senatus-Consultum. Order of the day. Despatches to the departments. Proclamation.' "

"Now, Marie-Claire, my child, a little more life, confound it! Cross over! That's it! Very good. Back again! Good! Very good! Buck up! Ah, the wretched woman! She's spoiling it all!"

He called the stage manager.

"Romilly, give us a little more light, one can't see an inch. Durville, my dear friend, what are you doing there in front of the prompter's box! You seem glued to it! Just get into your head, once for all, that you are not the statue of General Malet, that you are General Malet in person, that my play is not a catalogue of wax-work figures, but a living moving tragedy, one which brings the tears into your eyes, and——"

Words failed him, and he sobbed for a long while into his handkerchief. Then he roared:

"Holy thunder! Pradel! Romilly! Where is Romilly? Ah, there he is, the villain! Romilly, I told you to put the stove nearer the dormer-window. You have not done so. What are you thinking of, my friend?"

The rehearsal was suddenly brought to a standstill by a serious difficulty. Chevalier, the bearer of documents on which hung the fate of the Empire, was to escape from his prison by the dormer-window. The stage "business" had not yet been settled; it had been impossible to do so before the setting of the stage was completed. It was now discovered that the measurements had been wrongly taken, and the dormer-window was not accessible.

The author leapt on to the stage.

"Romilly, my friend, the stove is not in the place fixed on. How can you expect Chevalier to get out through the dormer-window? Push the stove to the right at once."

"I'm willing enough," said Romilly, "but we shall be blocking up the door."

"What's that? We shall be blocking up the door?"

"Precisely."

The manager of the theatre, the stage-manager, the scene-shifters stood examining the stage-setting with gloomy attention, while the author held his peace.

"Don't worry, Master," said Chevalier. "There's no need to change anything. I shall be able to jump out all right."

Climbing on to the stove, he did indeed succeed in grasping the sill of the window, and in hoisting

himself up until his elbows rested on it, a feat that had seemed impossible.

A murmur of admiration rose from the stage, the wings, and the house. Chevalier had produced an astonishing impression by his strength and agility.

"Splendid!" exclaimed the author. "Chevalier, my friend, that is perfect. The fellow is as nimble as a monkey. I'll be hanged if any of you could do as much. If all the parts were in such good hands as that of Florentin, the play would be lauded to the skies."

Nanteuil, in her box, almost admired him. For one brief second he had seemed to her more than man, both man and gorilla, and the fear with which he had inspired her was immeasurably increased. She did not love him; she had never loved him; she did not desire him; it was a long time since she had really wanted him; and, for some days past, she had been unable to imagine herself taking pleasure in any other than Ligny; but had she at that moment found herself alone with Chevalier she would have felt powerless, and she would have sought to appease him by her submission as one appeases a supernatural power.

On the stage, while an Empire *salon* was being lowered from the flies, though all the noise of the running gear and the grounding of the supports, the author held the whole of the company, as well

as all the supers, in the hollow of his hand, and at the same time gave them all advice, or illustrated what he wanted of them.

"You, the big woman, the cake-seller, Madame Ravaud, haven't you ever heard the women calling in the Champs-Élysées: 'Eat your fill, ladies! This way for a treat!' It is *sung*. Just learn the tune by to-morrow. And you, drummer-boy, just give me your drum; I'm going to teach you how to beat the roll, confound it! Fagette, my child, what the mischief are you doing at a ball given by the Minister of Police, if you haven't any stockings with golden clocks? Take off those knitted woolen stockings immediately. This is the very last play that I shall produce in this theatre. Where is the colonel of the 10th cohort? So it's you? Well then, my friend, your soldiers march past like so many pigs. Madame Marie-Claire, come forward a little, so that I may teach you how to curtsy."

He had a hundred eyes, a hundred mouths, and arms and legs everywhere.

In the house, Romilly was shaking hands with Monsieur Gombaut, of the Academy of Moral Sciences, who had dropped in as a neighbour.

"You may say what you will, Monsieur Gombaut, it is perhaps not accurate as far as facts are concerned, but it's drama."

"Malet's conspiracy," replied Monsieur Gom-

baut, "remains, and will doubtless remain for a long time to come, an historical enigma. The author of this drama has taken advantage of those points which are obscure in order to introduce dramatic elements. But what, to my thinking, is beyond a doubt, is that General Malet, although associated with Royalists, was himself a Republican, and was working for the re-establishment of popular Government. In the course of his examination during the trial, he pronounced a sublime and profound utterance. When the presiding judge of the court-martial asked him: 'Who were your accomplices?' Malet replied: 'All France, and you yourself, had I succeeded.' "

Leaning on the edge of Nanteuil's box, an aged sculptor, as venerable and as handsome as an ancient satyr, was gazing with glistening eye and smiling lips at the stage, which at that moment was in a state of commotion and confusion.

"Are you pleased with the play, Master?" Nanteuil asked him.

And the Master, who had no eyes for anything but bones, tendons and muscles, replied:

"Yes, indeed, mademoiselle; yes, indeed! I see over there a little creature, little Midi, whose shoulder attachment is a jewel."

He outlined it with his thumb. Tears welled up into his eyes.

Chevalier asked if he might enter the box. He was happy, less on account of his prodigious success than at seeing Félicie. He dreamed, in his infatuation, that she had come for his sake, that she loved him, that she was returning to him.

She feared him, and, as she was timid, she flattered him.

"I congratulate you, Chevalier. You were simply astounding. Your exit is a marvel. You can take my word for it. I am not the only one to say so. Fagette thought you were wonderful."

"Really?" asked Chevalier.

It was one of the happiest moments of his life.

A shrieking voice issued from the deserted heights of the third galleries, sounding through the house like the whistle of a locomotive.

"One can't hear a word you say, my children; speak louder and pronounce your words distinctly!"

The author appeared, infinitely small, in the shadow of the dome.

Thereupon the utterance of the players who were collected at the front of the stage, around a naphtha flare, rose more distinctly:

"The Emperor will allow the troops to rest for some weeks at Moscow; then with the rapidity of an eagle he will swoop down upon St. Petersburg."

"Spades, clubs, trump, two points to me."

"There we shall spend the winter, and next

spring we shall penetrate into India, crossing Persia, and the British power will be a thing of the past."

"Thirty-six in diamonds."

"And I the four aces."

By the way, gentlemen, what say you to the Imperial decree concerning the actors of Paris, dated from the Kremlin? There's an end of the squabbles between Mademoiselle Mars and Mademoiselle Leverd."

"Do look at Fagette," said Nanteuil. "She is charming in that blue Marie-Louise dress trimmed with chinchilla."

Madame Doulce brought out from under her furs a stack of tickets already soiled through having been too frequently offered.

"Master," she said, addressing Constantin Marc, "you know that next Sunday I am to give a reading, with appropriate remarks, of the best letters of Madame de Sévigné, for the benefit of the three poor orphans left by Lacour, the actor, who died this winter in so deplorable a fashion."

"Had he any talent?" asked Constantin Marc.

"None whatever," said Nanteuil.

"Well, then, in what way is his death deplorable?"

"Oh, Master," sighed Madame Doulce, "do not pretend to be unfeeling."

"I am not pretending to be unfeeling. But here is something that surprises me: the value which we set upon the lives of those who are not of the slightest interest to us. We seem as though we believe that life is in itself something precious. Yet nature teaches us plainly enough that nothing is more worthless and contemptible. In former days people were less besmeared with sentimentalism. Each of us held his own life to be infinitely precious, but he did not profess any respect whatever for the life of others. We were nearer to nature in those days. We were created to devour one another. But our debilitated, enervated, hypocritical race wallows in a sly cannibalism. While we are gulping one another down we declare that life is sacred, and we no longer dare to confess that life is murder."

"That life is murder," echoed Chevalier dreamily, without grasping the meaning of the words.

Then he poured forth a string of nebulous ideas:

"Murder and bloodshed, that may be! But amusing bloodshed, and comical murder. Life is a burlesque catastrophe, a terrible comedy, the mask of carnival over blood-stained cheeks. That is what life means to the artist; the artist on the stage, and the artist in action."

Nanteuil uneasily sought a meaning in these confused phrases.

The actor continued excitedly:

"Life is yet another thing: it is the flower and the knife, it is to see red one day and blue the next, it is hatred and love, ravishing, delightful hatred, cruel love."

"Monsieur Chevalier," asked Constantin Marc in the quietest of tones, "does it not seem to you natural to be a murderer, and do you not think that it is merely the fear of being killed that prevents us from killing?"

Chevalier replied in deep, pensive tones:

"Most certainly not! It would not be the fear of being killed that would prevent me from killing. I have no fear of death. But I feel a respect for the life of others. I am humane in spite of myself. I have for some time past been seriously considering the question which you have just asked me, Monsieur Constantin Marc. I have pondered over it day and night, and I know now that I could not kill any one."

At this, Nanteuil, filled with joy, cast upon him a look of contempt. She feared him no longer, and she could not forgive him for having alarmed her.

She rose.

"Good evening; I have a headache. Good-bye till to-morrow, Monsieur Constantin Marc." And she went out briskly.

Chevalier ran after her down the corridor, descended the stage staircase behind her, and rejoined her by the stage doorkeeper's box.

"Félicie, come and dine with me to-night at our cabaret. I should be so glad if you would! Will you?"

"Good gracious, no!"

"Why won't you?"

"Leave me alone; you are bothering me!"

She tried to escape. He detained her.

"I love you so! Don't be too cruel to me!"

Taking a step towards him, her lips curling back from her clenched teeth, she hissed into his ear:

"It's all over, over, over! You hear me? I am fed up with you."

Then, very gently and solemnly, he said:

"It is the last time that we two shall speak together. Listen, Félicie, before there is a tragedy I ought to warn you. I cannot compel you to love me. But I do not intend that you shall love another. For the last time I advise you not to see Monsieur de Ligny again. I shall prevent your belonging to him."

"You will prevent me? You? My poor dear fellow!"

In a still more gentle tone he replied:

"I mean it; I shall do it. A man can get what he wants; only he must pay the price."

CHAPTER V

RETURNING home, Félicie succumbed to a fit of tears. She saw Chevalier once more imploring her in a despairing voice with the look of a poor man. She had heard that voice and seen that expression when passing tramps, worn out with fatigue, on the high road, when her mother, fearing that her lungs were affected, had taken her to spend the winter at Antibes with a wealthy aunt. She despised Chevalier for his gentleness and tranquil manner. But the recollection of that face and that voice disturbed her. She could not eat, she felt as if she were suffocating. In the evening she was attacked by such an excruciating internal pain that she thought she must be dying. She thought this feeling of prostration was due to the fact that it was two days since she had seen Robert. It was only nine o'clock. She hoped that she might find him still at home, and put on her hat.

"Mamma, I have to go to the theatre this evening. I am off."

Out of consideration for her mother, she was in the habit of making such veiled explanations.

"Go, my child, but don't come home too late."

Ligny lived with his parents. He had, on the top floor of the charming house in the Rue Vernet, a small bachelor flat, lit by round windows, which he called his "œil-de-bœuf." Félicie sent word by the hall-porter that a lady was waiting for him in a carriage. Ligny did not care for women to look him up too often in the bosom of his family. His father, who was in the diplomatic service, and deeply engrossed in the foreign interests of the country, remained in an incredible state of ignorance as to what went on in his own house. But Madame de Ligny was determined that the decencies of life should be observed in her home, and her son was careful to satisfy her requirements in the matter of outward appearances, since they never probed to the bottom of things. She left him perfectly free to love where he would, and only rarely, in serious and expansive moments, did she hint that it was to the advantage of young men to cultivate the acquaintance of women of their own class. Hence it was that Robert had always dissuaded Félicie from coming to him in the Rue Vernet. He had rented, in the Boulevard de Villiers, a small house, where they could meet in absolute freedom. But on the present occasion, after two days without

seeing her, he was greatly pleased by her unexpected visit, and he came down immediately.

Leaning back in the cab, they drove through the darkness and the snow, at the quiet pace of their aged hack, through the streets and boulevards, while the darkness of the night cloaked their love-making.

At her door, having seen her home, he said:

"Good-bye till to-morrow."

"Yes, to-morrow, Boulevard de Villiers. Come early."

She was leaning on him preparatory to stepping down from the cab. Suddenly she started back.

"There! There! Among the trees. He has seen us. He was watching us."

"Who, then?"

"A man—some one I don't know."

She had just recognized Chevalier. She stepped out, rang the bell, and, nestling in Robert's fur coat, waited, trembling, for the door to open. When it was opened, she detained him.

"Robert, see me upstairs. I am frightened."

Not without some impatience, he followed her up the stairs.

Chevalier had waited for Félicie, in the little dining-room, before the armour which she had worn as Jeanne d'Arc, together with Madame Nanteuil,

until one o'clock in the morning. He had left at that hour, and had watched for her on the pavement, and on seeing the cab stop in front of the door he had concealed himself behind a tree. He knew very well that she would return with Ligny; but when he saw them together it was as if the earth had yawned beneath him, and, so that he should not fall to the ground, he had clutched the trunk of the tree. He remained until Ligny had emerged from the house; he watched him as, wrapped in his fur coat, he got into the cab, took a couple of steps as if to spring on him, stopped short, and then with long strides went down the boulevard.

He went his way, driven by the rain and wind. Feeling too hot, he doffed his felt hat, and derived a certain pleasure from the sense of the icy drops of water on his forehead. He was vaguely conscious that houses, trees, walls, and lights went past him indefinitely; he wandered on, dreaming.

He found himself, without knowing how he had got there, on a bridge which he hardly knew. Half-way across it stood the colossal statue of a woman. His mind was now at rest; he had formed a resolution. It was an old idea, which he had now driven into his brain like a nail, which pierced it through and through. He no longer examined it. He calculated coldly the means of carrying out the

thing he had determined to do. He walked straight ahead at random, absorbed in thought, and as calm as a mathematician.

On the Pont des Arts he became aware that a dog was following him. He was a big, long-haired farm dog, with eyes of different colours, which were full of gentleness, and an expression of infinite distress. Chevalier spoke to him:

"You've no collar. You are not happy. Poor fellow, I can't do anything for you."

By four o'clock in the morning he found himself in the Avenue de l'Observatoire. On seeing the houses of the Boulevard Saint-Michel he experienced a painful impression and abruptly turned back toward the Observatory. The dog had vanished. Near the monument of the Lion of Belfort, Chevalier stopped in front of a deep trench which cut the road in two. Against the bank of excavated earth, under a tarpaulin supported by four stakes, an old man was keeping vigil before a brazier. The lappets of his rabbit-skin cap were down over his ears; his huge nose was a flaming red. He raised his head; his eyes, which were watering, seemed wholly white, without pupils, each set in a ring of fire and tears. He was stuffing into the bowl of his cutty a few scraps of canteen tobacco, mixed with bread-crumbs, which did not fill half the bowl of his little pipe.

"Will you have some tobacco, old fellow?" asked Chevalier, offering him his pouch.

The man's answer was slow in coming. His understanding was not quick, and courtesies astonished him. Finally, he opened a mouth which was quite black, and said:

"I won't say no to that."

He half rose from his seat. One of his feet was shod in an old slipper; the other was swathed in rags. Slowly, with hands numb with the cold, he stuffed his pipe. It was snowing, a snow that melted as it fell.

"You will excuse me?" said Chevalier, and he slipped under the tarpaulin and seated himself beside the old man.

From time to time they exchanged a remark.

"Rotten weather!"

"It's what we expect at this season. Winter's hard; summer's better."

"So you look after the job at night, old fellow?"

The old man answered readily when questioned. Before he spoke his throat emitted a long, very gentle murmur.

"I do one thing one day; another thing another. Odd jobs. See?"

"You are not a Parisian?"

"No, I was born in La Creuse. I used to

work as a navvy in the Vosges. I left there the year the Prussians and other foreigners came. There were thousands of them. Can't understand where they all came from. Maybe you've heard of the war of the Prussians, young man?"

He remained silent for a long spell and then resumed:

"So you are out on a spree, my lad. You don't feel like going back to the works yet?"

"I am an actor," replied Chevalier.

The old man, who did not understand, inquired:

"Where is it, your works?"

Chevalier was anxious to rouse the old man's admiration.

"I play comedy parts in a big theatre," he said. "I am one of the principal actors at the Odéon. You know the Odéon?"

The watchman shook his head. No, he did not know the Odéon. After a prolonged silence, he once more opened the black cavern of his mouth:

"And so, young man, you are on the loose. You don't want to go back to the works, eh?"

Chevalier replied:

"Read the paper the day after to-morrow, you will see my name in it."

The old man tried to discover a meaning in these words, but it was too difficult; he gave it up, and reverted to his familiar train of thought.

"When once one's off on the loose, it is sometimes for weeks and months."

At daybreak, Chevalier resumed his wanderings. The sky was milky. Heavy wheels were breaking the silence of the paved roads. Voices, here and there, rang through the keen air. The snow was no longer falling. He walked on at haphazard. The spectacle of the city's reviving life made him feel almost cheerful. On the Pont des Arts he stood for a long time watching the Seine flow by, after which he continued on his way. On the Place du Havre he saw an open café. A faint streak of dawn was reddening the front winows. The waiters were sanding the brick pavement and setting out the tables. He flung himself into a chair.

"Waiter, an absinthe."

CHAPTER VI

IN the cab, beyond the fortifications, which were skirted by the deserted boulevard, Félicie and Robert held one another in a close embrace.

"Don't you love your own Félicie? Tell me! Doesn't it flatter your vanity to possess a little woman who makes people cheer and clap her, who is written about in the newspapers? Mamma pastes all my notices in her album. The album is full already."

He replied that he had not waited for her to succeed before discovering how charming she was; and, in fact, their liaison had begun when she was making an obscure first appearance at the Odéon in a revival which had fallen flat.

"When you told me that you wanted me, I didn't keep you waiting, did I? We didn't take long about that! Wasn't I right? You are too sensible to think badly of me because I didn't keep things dragging along. When I saw you for the first time I felt that I was to be yours, so it wasn't worth while delaying. I don't regret it. Do you?"

The cab stopped at a short distance from the fortifications, in front of a garden railing.

This railing, which had not been painted for a long time, stood on a wall faced with pebbles, low and broad enough to permit of children perching themselves on it. It was screened half-way up by a sheet of iron with a toothed edge, and its rusty spikes did not rise more than ten feet above the ground. In the centre, between two pillars of masonry surmounted by cast-iron vases, the railing formed a gate opening in the middle, filled in across its lower part, and furnished, on the inside, with worm-eaten slatted shutters.

They alighted from the cab. The trees of the boulevard, in four straight lines, lifted their frail skeletons in the fog. They heard, through the wide silence, the diminishing rattle of their cab, on its way back to the barrier, and the trotting of a horse coming from Paris.

"How dismal the country is!" she said, with a shiver.

"But, my darling, the Boulevard de Villiers is not the country."

He could not open the gate, and the lock creaked. Irritated by the sound, she said:

"Open it, do: the noise is getting on my nerves."

She noticed that the cab which had come from

Paris had stopped near their house, at about the tenth tree from where she stood; she looked at the thin, streaming horse and the shabby driver, and asked:

"What is that carriage?"

"It's a cab, my pet."

"Why does it stop here?"

"It has not stopped here, it's stopping in front of the next house."

"There is no next house; there's only a vacant lot."

"Well, then, it has stopped in front of a vacant lot. What more can I tell you?"

"I don't see anyone getting out of it?"

"The driver is perhaps waiting for a fare."

"What, in front of a vacant lot!"

"Probably, my dear. This lock has got rusty."

She crept along, hiding herself behind the trees, toward the spot where the cab had stopped, and then returned to Ligny, who had succeeded in unlocking the gate.

"Robert, the blinds of the cab are down."

"Well, then, there's a loving couple inside."

"Don't you think there's something queer about that cab?"

"It is not a thing of beauty, but all cabs are ugly. Come in."

"Isn't somebody following us?"

"Whom do you expect to follow us?"

"I don't know. One of your women friends."

But she was not saying what was in her thoughts.

"Do come in, my darling."

When she had entered the garden she said:

"Be sure to close the gate properly, Robert."

Before them stretched a small oval grass-plot. Behind it stood the house, with its flight of three steps, sheltered by a zinc portico, its six windows, and its slate roof.

Ligny had rented it for a year from an old merchant's clerk, who had wearied of it because nocturnal prowlers used to steal his fowls and rabbits. On either side of the grass-plot a gravel path led to the steps. They took the path on the right. The gravel creaked beneath their feet.

"Madame Simonneau has forgotten to close the shutters again," said Ligny.

Madame Simonneau was a woman from Neuilly, who came every morning to clean up.

A large Judas-tree, leaning to one side, and to all appearance dead, stretched one of its round black branches as far as the portico.

"I don't quite like that tree," said Félicie; "its branches are like great snakes. One of them goes almost into our room."

They went up the three front steps; and, while he was looking through his bunch of keys for the

key of the front door, she rested her head on his shoulder.

. . . . . .

Félicie, when unveiling her beauty, displayed a serene pride which made her adorable. She revealed such a quiet satisfaction in her nudity that her chemise, when it fell to her feet, made the onlooker think of a white peacock.

And when Robert saw her in her nakedness, bright as the streams or stars, he said:

"At least you don't make one badger you! It's curious: there are women, who, even if you don't ask them for anything, surrender themselves completely, go just as far as it's possible to go, yet all the time they won't let you see so much as a finger-breadth of skin."

"Why?" asked Félicie, playing with the airy threads of her hair.

Robert de Ligny had experience of women. Yet he did not realize what an insidious question this was. He had received some training in moral science, and in replying he derived inspiration from the professors whose classes he had attended.

"It is doubtless a matter of training, religious principles, and an innate feeling which survives even when——"

This was not at all what he ought to have replied, for Félicie, shrugging her shoulders, and

placing her hands upon her smoothly polished hips, interrupted him sharply:

"Well, you are simple! It's because they've got bad figures! Training! Religion! It makes me boil to hear such rubbish! Have I been brought up any worse than other women? Have I less religion than they have? Tell me, Robert, how many really well-made women have you ever seen? Just reckon them up on your fingers. Yes, there are heaps of women who won't show their shoulders or anything. Take Fagette; she won't let even women see her undress; when she puts a clean chemise on she holds the old one between her teeth. Sure enough, I should do the same if I were built as she is!"

She relapsed into silence, and, with quiet arrogance, slowly ran the palms of her hands over her sides and her loins, observing proudly:

"And the best of it is that there's not too much of me anywhere."

She was conscious of the charm imparted to her beauty by the graceful slenderness of her outlines.

Now her head, thrown back on the pillow, was bathed in the masses of her golden tresses, which lay streaming in all directions; her slender body, slightly raised by a pillow slipped beneath her loins, lay motionless at full length; one gleaming leg was extended along the edge of the bed, ending in a

sharply chiselled foot like the point of a sword. The light from the great fire which had been lit in the fireplace gilded her flesh, casting palpitating lights and shadows over her motionless body, clothing it in mystery and splendour, while her outer clothing and her underlinen, lying on the chairs and the carpet, waited, like a docile flock.

She raised herself on her elbow, resting her cheek in her hand.

"You are the first, really you are, I am not lying: the others don't exist."

He felt no jealousy in respect of the past; he had no fear of comparisons. He questioned her:

"Then the others?"

"To begin with, there were only two: my professor, and he of course doesn't count, and there was the man I told you about, a solid sort of a person, whom my mother saddled me with."

"No more?"

"I swear it."

"And Chevalier?"

"Chevalier? He? Good gracious, no! You wouldn't have had me look at him!"

"And the solid sort of person found by your mother, he, too, does not count any more?"

"I assure you that, with you, I am another woman. It's the solemn truth that you are the first to possess me. It's queer, all the same.

Directly I set my eyes on you I wanted you. Quite suddenly I felt I must have you. I felt it somehow. What? I should think it very hard to say. Oh, I didn't stop to think. With your conventional, stiff, frigid manners, and your appearance, like a curly-haired little wolf, you pleased me, that was all! And now I could not do without you. No, indeed, I couldn't."

He assured her that on her surrender he had been deliciously surprised; he said all sorts of pretty, caressing things, all of which had been said before.

Taking his head in her hands, she said:

"You have really the teeth of a wolf. I think it was your teeth that made me want you the first day. Bite me!"

He pressed her to his bosom, and felt her firm supple body respond to his embrace. Suddenly she released herself:

"Don't you hear the gravel creaking?"

"No."

"Listen: I can hear a sound of footsteps on the path."

Sitting upright, her body bent forward, she strained her ears.

He was disappointed, excited, irritated, and perhaps his self-esteem was slightly hurt.

"What has come over you? It's absurd."

She cried very sharply:

"Do hold your tongue!"

She was listening intently to a slight sound, near at hand, as of breaking branches.

Suddenly she leapt from the bed with such instinctive agility, with a movement so like the rapid spring of a young animal, that Ligny, although by no means of a literary turn of mind, thought of the cat metamorphosed into a woman.

"Are you crazy? Where are you going?"

Raising a corner of the curtain, she wiped the moisture from the corner of a pane, and peered out through the window. She saw nothing but the night. The noise had ceased altogether.

During this time, Ligny, lying moodily against the wall, was grumbling:

"As you will, but, if you catch a cold, so much the worse for you!"

She glided back into bed. At first he remained somewhat resentful; but she wrapped him about with the delicious freshness of her body.

When they came to themselves they were surprised to see by one of their watches that it was seven o'clock.

Ligny lit the lamp, a paraffin lamp, supported on a column, with a cut-glass container inside which the wick was curled up like a tape-worm. Félicie was very quick in dressing herself. They

had to descend one floor by a wooden staircase, dark and narrow. He went ahead, carrying the lamp, and halted in the passage.

"You go out, darling, before I put the lamp out."

She opened the door, and immediately recoiled with a loud shriek. She had seen Chevalier standing on the outer steps, with arms extended, tall, black, erect as a crucifix. His hand grasped a revolver. The glint of the weapon was not perceptible; nevertheless she saw it quite distinctly.

"What's the matter?" demanded Ligny, who was turning down the wick of the lamp.

"Listen, but don't come near me!" cried Chevalier in a loud voice. "I forbid you to belong to one another. This is my dying wish. Good-bye, Félicie."

And he slipped the barrel of the revolver into his mouth.

Crouching against the passage wall, she closed her eyes. When she reopened them, Chevalier was lying on his side, across the doorway. His eyes were wide open, and he seemed to be gazing at them with a smile. A thread of blood was trickling from his mouth over the flagstones of the porch. A convulsive tremor shook his arm. Then he ceased to move. As he lay there, huddled up, he seemed smaller than usual.

On hearing the report of the revolver, Ligny had hurriedly come forward. In the darkness of the night he raised the body, and immediately lowering it gently to the ground he attempted to strike matches, which the wind promptly extinguished. At last, by the flare of one of the matches, he saw that the bullet had carried away part of the skull, that the meninges were laid bare over an area as large as the palm of the hand; this area was grey, oozing blood, and very irregular in shape, its outlines reminding Ligny of the map of Africa. He was conscious of a sudden feeling of respect in the presence of this dead man. Placing his hands under the armpits, he dragged Chevalier with the minutest precautions into the room at the side. Leaving him there, he hurried through the house in quest of Félicie, calling to her.

He found her in the bedroom, with her head buried under the bed-clothes of the unmade bed, crying: Mamma! Mamma!" and repeating prayers.

"Don't stay here, Félicie."

She went downstairs with him. But, on reaching the hall, she said:

"You know very well that we can't go out that way."

He showed her out by the kitchen door.

CHAPTER VII

EFT alone in the silent house, Robert de Ligny relit the lamp. Serious and even somewhat solemn voices were beginning to speak within him. Moulded from childhood by the rules of moral responsibility, he now experienced a sensation of painful regret, akin to remorse. Reflecting that he had caused the death of this man, albeit without intending it or knowing it, he did not feel wholly innocent. Shreds of his philosophic and religious training came back to him, disturbing his conscience. The phrases of moralists and preachers, learned at school, which had sunk to the very depths of his memory, suddenly rose in his mind. Its inward voices repeated them to him. They said, quoting some old religious orator: "When we abandon ourselves to irregularities of conduct, even to those regarded as least culpable in the opinion of the world, we render ourselves liable to commit the most reprehensible actions. We perceive, from the most frightful examples, that voluptuousness leads to crime."

These maxims, upon which he had never reflected, suddenly assumed for him a precise and austere meaning. He thought the matter over seriously. But since his mind was not deeply religious, and since he was incapable of cherishing exaggerated scruples, he was conscious of only a passable degree of edification, which was steadily diminishing. Before long he decided that such scruples were out of place and that they could not possibly apply to the situation. "When we abandon ourselves to irregularities of conduct, even to those regarded as least culpable in the opinion of the world . . . We perceive, from the most frightful examples . . ." These phrases, which only a little while ago had reverberated through his soul like a peal of thunder, he now heard in the snuffling and throaty voices of the professors and priests who had taught them to him, and he found them somewhat ridiculous. By a natural association of ideas he recalled a passage from an ancient Roman history—which he had read, when in the second form, during a certain course of study, and which had impressed itself on his mind—a few lines concerning a lady who was convicted of adultery and accused of having set fire to Rome. "So true it is," ran the historian's comment, "that a person who violates the laws of chastity is capable of any crime." He smiled inwardly at this recollection,

reflecting that the moralists, after all, had queer ideas about life.

The wick, which was charring, gave an insufficient light. He could not manage to snuff it, and it was giving out a horrible stench of paraffin. Thinking of the author of the passage relating to the Roman lady, he said to himself: "Sure enough, it was a queer idea that he got hold of there!"

He felt reassured as to his innocence. His slight feeling of remorse had entirely evaporated, and he was unable to conceive how he could for a moment have believed himself responsible for Chevalier's death. Yet the affair troubled him.

Suddenly he thought: "Supposing he were still alive!"

A while ago, for the space of a second, by the light of a match blown out as soon as it was struck, he had seen the hole in the actor's skull. But what if he had seen incorrectly? What if he had taken a mere graze of the skin for a serious lesion of the brain and skull? Does a man retain his powers of judgment in the first moments of surprise and horror? A wound may be hideous without being mortal, or even particularly serious. It had certainly seemed to him that the man was dead. But was he a medical man, able to judge with certainty?

He lost all patience with the wick, which was still charring, and muttered:

"This lamp is enough to poison one."

Then recalling a trick of speech habitual to Dr. Socrates, as to the origin of which he was ignorant, he repeated mentally:

"This lamp stinks like thirty-six cart-loads of devils."

Instances occurred to him of several abortive attempts at suicide. He remembered having read in a newspaper that a married man, after killing his wife, had, like Chevalier, fired his revolver into his mouth, but had only succeeded in shattering his jaw; he remembered that at his club a well-known sportsman, after a card scandal, tried to blow out his brains but merely shot off an ear. These instances applied to Chevalier with striking exactitude.

"Supposing he were not dead."

He wished and hoped against all evidence that the unfortunate man might still be breathing, that he might be saved. He thought of fetching bandages, of giving first aid. Intending to re-examine the man lying in the front room, he raised the lamp, which was still emitting an insufficient light, too suddenly, and so extinguished it. Whereupon, surprised by the sudden darkness, he lost patience and exclaimed:

"Confound the blasted thing!"

While lighting it again, he flattered himself with the idea that Chevalier, once taken to hospital, would regain consciousness, and would live, and seeing him already on his feet, perched on his long legs, bawling, clearing his throat, sneering, his desire for his recovery became less eager; he was even beginning to cease to desire it, to regard it as annoying and inconsiderate. He asked himself anxiously, with a feeling of real uneasiness:

"What in the world would he do if he came back, that dismal actor fellow? Would he return to the Odéon? Would he stroll through its corridors displaying his great scar? Would he once more have to see him prowling round Félicie?"

He held the lighted lamp close to the body and recognized the livid bleeding wound, the irregular outline of which reminded him of the Africa of his schoolboy maps.

Plainly death had been instantaneous, and he failed to understand how he could for a moment have doubted it.

He left the house and proceeded to stride up and down in the garden. The image of the wound was flashing before his eyes like the impression caused by too bright a light. It moved away from him, increasing in size against the black sky; it took the shape of a pale continent whence he saw

swarms of distracted little blacks pouring forth, armed with bows and arrows.

He decided that the first thing to do was to fetch Madame Simonneau, who lived close at hand, in the Boulevard Bineau, in the residential part of the café. He closed the gate carefully, and went in search of the housekeeper. Once on the boulevard, he recovered his equanimity. He felt most uncomfortable about the accident; he accepted the accomplished fact, but he cavilled at fate in respect of the circumstances. Since there had to be a death, he gave his consent that there should be one, but he would have preferred another. Toward this one he was conscious of a feeling of disgust and repugnance. He said to himself vaguely:

"I concede a suicide. But what is the good of a ridiculous and declamatory suicide? Couldn't the fellow have killed himself at home? Couldn't he, if his determination was irrevocable, have carried it out discreetly, with proper pride? That is what a gentleman would have done in his position. Then one might have pitied him, and respected his memory."

He recalled word for word his conversation with Félicie in the bedroom an hour before the tragedy. He asked her if she had not for a time been Chevalier's mistress. He had asked her this,

not because he wanted to know, for he had very little doubt of it, but in order to show that he knew it. And she had replied indignantly: "Chevalier? He? Good gracious, no! You wouldn't have had me look at him!"

He did not blame her for having lied. All women lie. He rather enjoyed the graceful and easy manner with which she had cast the fellow out of her past. But he was vexed with her for having given herself to a low-down actor. Chevalier spoilt Félicie for him. Why did she take lovers of that type? Was she wanting in taste? Did she not exercise a certain selection? Did she behave like a woman of the town? Did she lack a certain sense of niceness which warns women as to what they may or may not do? Didn't she know how to behave? Well, this was the sort of thing that happened if women had no breeding. He blamed Félicie for the accident that had occurred and was relieved of a heavy incubus.

Madame Simonneau was not at home. He inquired her whereabouts of the waiters in the café, the grocer's assistants, the girls at the laundry, the police, and the postman. At last, following the direction of a neighbour, he found her poulticing an old lady, for she was a nurse. Her face was purple and she reeked of brandy. He sent her to watch the corpse. He instructed her to cover it

with a sheet, and to hold herself at the disposal of the commissary and the doctor, who would come for the particulars. She replied, somewhat nettled, that she knew, please God, what she had to do. She did indeed know. Madame Simonneau was born in a social circle which is obsequious to the constituted authorities and respects the dead. But when, having questioned Monsieur de Ligny, she learnt that he had dragged the body into the front room, she could not conceal from him that such behaviour was imprudent and might expose him to unpleasantness.

"You ought not to have done it," she told him. "When anyone has killed himself, you must never touch him before the police come."

Ligny thereupon went off to notify the commissary. The first excitement having passed off, he no longer felt any surprise, doubtless because events which, considered from a distance, would seem strange, when they take place before us appear quite natural, as indeed they are. They unfold themselves in an ordinary fashion, falling into place as a succession of petty facts, and eventually losing themselves in the everyday commonplace of life. His mind was distracted from the violent death of an unfortunate fellow-creature by the very circumstances of that death, by the part which he had played in the affair and

the occupation which it had imposed upon him. On his way to the commissary's he felt as calm and as free from mental care as though he had been on his way to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to decipher despatches.

At nine o'clock in the evening, the police commissary entered the garden with his secretary and a policeman. The municipal physician, Monsieur Hibry, arrived simultaneously. Already, thanks to the industry of Madame Simonneau, who was always interested in matters of supply, the house exhaled a violent smell of carbolic and was blazing with the candles which she had lit. Madame Simonneau was bustling to and fro, actuated by an urgent desire to procure a crucifix and a bough of consecrated box-wood for the dead. The doctor examined the corpse by the light of a candle.

He was a bulky man with a ruddy complexion. He breathed noisily. He had just dined.

"The bullet, a large calibre bullet," he said, "penetrated by way of the palatal vault, traversed the brain, and finally fractured the left parietal bone, carrying away a portion of the cerebral substance, and blowing out a piece of the skull. Death was instantaneous."

He returned the candle to Madame Simonneau and continued:

"Splinters of the skull were projected to a certain distance. They will probably be found in the garden. I should conjecture that the bullet was round-nosed. A conical bullet would have caused less destruction."

However, the commissary, Monsieur Josse-Arbrissel, a tall, thin man with a long grey moustache, seemed neither to see nor to hear. A dog was howling outside the garden gate.

"The direction of the wound," said the doctor, "as well as the fingers of the right hand, which are still contracted, are more than ample proof of suicide."

He lit a cigar.

"We are sufficiently informed," remarked the commissary.

"I regret, gentlemen, to have disturbed you," said Robert de Ligny, "and I thank you for the courteous manner in which you have carried out your official duties."

The secretary and the police agent, Madame Simonneau showing the way, carried the body up to the first floor.

Monsieur Josse-Arbrissel was biting his nails and looking into space.

"A tragedy of jealousy," he remarked, "nothing is more common. We have here in Neuilly a steady average of self-inflicted deaths. Out of a hundred suicides thirty are caused by gambling.

The others are due to disappointment in love, poverty, or incurable disease."

"Chevalier?" inquired Dr. Hibry, who was a lover of the theatre. "Chevalier? Wait a minute! I have seen him; I saw him at a benefit performance, at the Variétés. Of course! He recited a monologue."

The dog howled outside the garden gate.

"You cannot imagine," resumed the commissary, "the disasters caused in this municipality by the *pari mutuel.* I am not exaggerating when I assert that at least thirty per cent. of the suicides which I have to look into are caused by gambling. Everybody gambles here. Every hairdresser's shop is a clandestine betting agency. No later than last week a concierge in the Avenue du Roule was found hanging from a tree in the Bois de Boulogne. Now, working men, servants, and junior clerks who gamble do not need to take their own lives. They move to another quarter, they disappear. But a man of position, an official whom gambling has ruined, who is overwhelmed by clamorous creditors, threatened with distraint, and on the point of being dragged before a court of justice, cannot disappear. What is to become of him?"

"I have it!" exclaimed the physician. "He recited *The Duel in the Prairie.* People are rather tired of monologues, but that is very funny. You

remember! 'Will you fight with the sword?' 'No, sir.' 'The pistol?' 'No, sir.' 'The sabre, the knife?' 'No, sir.' 'Ah, then, I see what you want. You are not fastidious. What you want is a duel in the prairie. I agree. We will replace the prairie by a five-storied house. You are permitted to conceal yourself in the vegetation.' Chevalier used to recite *The Duel in the Prairie* in a very humorous manner. He amused me greatly that night. It is true that I am not an ungrateful audience; I worship the theatre."

The commissary was not listening. He was following up his own train of thought.

"It will never be known, how many fortunes and lives are devoured each year by the *pari mutuel.* Gambling never releases its victims; when it has despoiled them of everything, it still remains their only hope. What else, indeed, will permit them to hope?"

He ceased, straining his ear to catch the distant cry of a news vendor, and rushed out into the avenue in pursuit of the fugitive yelping shadow, hailed him, and snatched from him a sporting paper, which he spread out under the light of a gas-lamp, scanning its pages for certain names of horses: *Fleur-des-pois, La Châtelaine, Lucrèce.* With haggard eyes, trembling hands, dumbfounded, crushed, he dropped the sheet: his horse had not won.

And Dr. Hibry, observing him from a distance, reflected that some day, in his capacity of physician to the dead, he might well be called upon to certify the suicide of his commissary of police, and he made up his mind in advance to conclude, as far as possible, that his death was due to accidental causes.

Suddenly he seized his umbrella.

"I must be off," he said. "I have been given a seat for the Opéra-Comique to-night. It would be a pity to waste it."

Before leaving the house, Ligny asked Madame Simonneau:

"Where have you put him?"

"In the bed," replied Madame Simonneau. "It was more decent."

He made no objection, and raising his eyes to the front of the house, he saw at the windows of the bedroom, through the muslin curtains, the light of the two candles which the housekeeper had placed on the bedside table.

"Perhaps," he said, "one might get a nun to watch by him."

"It's not necessary," replied Madame Simonneau, who had invited some neighbours of her own sex, and had ordered her wine and meat. "It's not necessary, I will watch by him myself."

Ligny did not press the point.

The dog was still howling outside the gate.

Returning on foot to the barrier, he noticed, over Paris, a reddish glow which filled the whole sky. Above the chimney-pots the factory chimneys rose grotesque and black, against this fiery mist, seeming to look down with a ridiculous familiarity upon the mysterious conflagration of a world. The few passers-by whom he met on the boulevard strolled along quietly, without raising their heads. Although he knew that when cities are wrapped in night the moist atmosphere often reflects the lights, becoming tinged with this uniform glow, which shines without a flicker, he fancied that he was looking at the reflection of a vast fire. He accepted, without reflection, the idea that Paris was sinking into the abyss of a prodigious conflagration; he found it natural that the private catastrophe in which he had become involved should be merged into a public disaster and that this same night should be for a whole population, as for him, a night of sinister happenings.

Being extremely hungry, he took a cab at the barrier, and had himself driven to a restaurant in the Rue Royale. In the bright, warm room he was conscious of a sense of well-being. After ordering his meal, he opened an evening newspaper and saw, in the Parliamentary report, that his Minister had delivered a speech. On reading it, he smothered a slight laugh; he remembered

certain stories told at the Quai d'Orsay. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was enamoured of Madame de Neuilles, an elderly lady with a lurid past, whom public rumour had raised to the status of adventuress and spy. He was wont, it was whispered, to try on her the speeches which he was to deliver in the Chamber. Ligny, who had formerly been to a certain small extent the lover of Madame de Neuilles, pictured to himself the statesman in his shirt reciting to his lady-love the following statement of principles: "Far be it from me to disregard the legitimate susceptibilities of the national sentiment. Resolutely pacific, but jealous of France's honour, the Government will, etc." This vision put him in a merry mood. He turned the page, and read: To-morrow at the Odéon, first performance (in this theatre) of *La Nuit du 23 octobre 1812* with Messieurs Durville, Maury, Romilly, Destrée, Vicar, Léon Clim, Valroche, Aman, Chevalier. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

AT one o'clock on the following day *La Grille* was in rehearsal, for the first time, in the green-room of the theatre. A dismal light spread like a pall over the grey stones of the roof, the galleries, and the columns. In the depressing majesty of this pallid architecture, beneath the statue of Racine, the leading actors were reading before Pradel, the manager of the house, their parts, which they did not yet know. Romilly, the stage manager, and Constantin Marc, the author of the piece, were all three seated on a red velvet sofa, while, from a bench set back between two columns, was exhaled the vigilant hatred and whispered jealousy of the actresses left out of the cast.

The lover, Paul Delage, was with difficulty deciphering a speech:

" 'I recognize the château with its brick walls, its slated roof; the park, where I have so often entwined her initials and mine on the bark of the trees; the pond whose slumbering waters . . .' "

Fagette rebuked him:

" 'Beware, Aimeri, lest the château know you not again, lest the park forget your name, lest the pond murmur: "Who is this stranger?" ' "

But she had a cold, and was reading from a manuscript copy full of mistakes.

"Don't stand there, Fagette: it's the summer-house," said Romilly.

"How do you expect me to know that?"

"There's a chair put there."

" 'Lest the pond murmur: "Who is this stranger?" ' "

"Mademoiselle Nanteuil, it's your cue—— Where has Nanteuil got to? Nanteuil!"

Nanteuil came forward muffled up in her furs, her little bag and her part in her hand, white as a sheet, her eyes sunken, her legs nerveless. When fully awake she had seen the dead man enter her bedroom.

She inquired:

"Where do I make my entrance from?"

"From the right."

"All right."

And she read:

" 'Cousin, I was so happy when I awoke this morning, I do not know why it was. Can you perhaps tell me?' "

Delage read his reply:

" 'It may be, Cécile, that it was due to a special dispensation of Providence or of fate. The God who loves you suffers you to smile, in the hour of weeping and the gnashing of teeth.' "

"Nanteuil, my darling, you cross the stage," said Romilly. "Delage, stand aside a bit to let her pass."

Nanteuil crossed over.

" 'Terrible days, do you say, Aimeri? Our days are what we make them. They are terrible for evil-doers only.' "

Romilly interrupted:

"Delage, efface yourself a trifle; be careful not to hide her from the audience. Once more, Nanteuil."

Nanteuil repeated:

" 'Terrible days, do you say, Aimeri? Our days are what we make them. They are terrible for evil-doers only.' "

Constantin Marc no longer recognized his handiwork, he could no longer even hear the sound of his beloved phrases, which he had so often repeated to himself in the Vivarais woods. Dumbfounded and dazed, he held his peace.

Nanteuil tripped daintily across the stage, and resumed reading her part:

" 'You will perhaps think me very foolish, Aimeri; in the convent where I was brought up, I often used to envy the fate of the victims.' "

Delage took up his cue, but he had overlooked a page of the manuscript:

" 'The weather is magnificent. Already the guests are strolling about the garden.' "

It became necessary to start all over again.

" 'Terrible days, do you say, Aimeri . . .' "

And so they proceeded, without troubling to understand, but careful to regulate their movements, as if studying the figures of a dance.

"In the interests of the play, we shall have to make some cuts," said Pradel to the dismayed author.

And Delage continued:

" 'Do not blame me, Cécile: I felt for you a friendship dating from childhood, one of those fraternal friendships which impart to the love which springs from them a disquieting appearance of incest.' "

"Incest," shouted Pradel. "You cannot let the word 'incest' remain, Monsieur Constantin Marc. The public has susceptibilities of which you have no idea. Moreover, the order of the two speeches which follow must be transposed. The optics of the stage require it."

The rehearsal was interrupted. Romilly caught sight of Durville who, in a recess, was telling racy stories.

"Durville, you can go. The second act will not be rehearsed to-day."

Before leaving, the old actor went up to Nanteuil, to press her hand. Judging that this was the moment to assure her of his sympathy, he summoned up the tears to his eyes, as anyone condoling with her would have done in his place. But he did it admirably. The pupils of his eyes swam in their orbits, like the moon amid clouds. The corners of his lips were turned down in two deep furrows which prolonged them to the bottom of his chin. He appeared to be genuinely afflicted.

"My poor darling," he sighed, "I pity you, I do indeed! To see one for whom one has experienced a—feeling—with whom one has—lived in intimacy—to see him carried off at a blow—a tragic blow—is hard, is terrible!"

And he extended his compassionate hands. Nanteuil, completely unnerved, and crushing her tiny handkerchief and her part in her hands, turned her back upon him, and hissed between her teeth:

"Old idiot!"

Fagette passed her arm round her waist, and led her gently aside to the foot of Racine's statue, where she whispered into her ear:

"Listen to me, my dear. This affair must be completely hushed up. Everybody is talking about it. If you let people talk, they will brand you for life as Chevalier's widow."

Then, being something of a talker, she added:

"I know you, I am your best friend. I know

your value. But beware, Félicie: women are held at their own valuation."

Every one of Fagette's shafts told. Nanteuil, with fiery cheeks, held back her tears. Too young to possess or even to desire the prudence which comes to celebrated actresses when of an age to graduate as women of the world of fashion, she was full of self-esteem, and since she had known what it was to love another she was eager to efface everything unfashionable from her past; she felt that Chevalier, in killing himself for her sake, had behaved towards her publicly with a familiarity which made her ridiculous. Still unaware that all things fall into oblivion, and are lost in the swift current of our days, that all our actions flow like the waters of a river, between banks that have no memory, she pondered, irritated and dejected, at the feet of Jean Racine, who understood her grief.

"Just look at her," said Madame Marie-Claire to young Delage. "She wants to cry. I understand her. A man killed himself for me. I was greatly upset by it. He was a count."

"Well, begin again!" shouted Pradel. "Come now, Mademoiselle Nanteuil, your cue!"

Whereupon Nanteuil:

"'Cousin, I was so happy when I awoke this morning . . .'"

Suddenly, Madame Doulce appeared. Pon-

derous and mournful, she let fall the following words:

"I have very sad news. The parish priest will not allow him to enter his church."

As Chevalier had no relations left other than a sister, a working-woman at Pantin, Madame Doulce had undertaken to make arrangements for the funeral at the expense of the members of the company.

They gathered round her. She continued:

"The Church rejects him as though he were accurst! That's dreadful!"

"Why?" asked Romilly.

Madame Doulce replied in a very low tone and as if reluctantly:

"Because he committed suicide."

"We must see to this," said Pradel.

Romilly displayed an eager desire to be of service.

"The curé knows me," he said. "He is a very decent fellow. I'll just run over to Saint-Étienne-du-Mont, and I'd be greatly surprised if——"

Madame Doulce shook her head sadly:

"All is useless."

"All the same, we must have a religious service," said Romilly, with all the authority of a stage-manager.

"Quite so," said Madame Doulce.

Madame Marie-Claire, deeply exercised in her mind, was of opinion that the priests could be compelled to say a Mass.

"Let us keep cool," said Pradel, caressing his venerable beard. "Under Louis VIII the people broke in the doors of Saint-Roch, which had been closed to the coffin of Mademoiselle Raucourt. We live in other times, and under different circumstances. We must have recourse to gentler methods."

Constantin Marc, seeing to his great regret that his play was abandoned, had likewise approached Madame Doulce; he inquired of her:

"Why should you want Chevalier to be blessed by the Church? Personally, I am a Catholic. With me, it is not a faith, it is a system, and I look upon it as a duty to participate in all the external practices of worship. I am on the side of all authorities. I am for the judge, the soldier, the priest. I cannot therefore be suspected of favouring civil burials. But I hardly understand why you persist in offering the curé of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont a dead body which he repudiates. Now why do you want this unfortunate Chevalier to go to church?"

"Why?" replied Madame Doulce. "For the salvation of his soul and because it is more seemly."

"What would be seemly," replied Constantin

Marc, "would be to obey the laws of the Church, which excommunicates suicides."

"Monsieur Constantin Marc, have you read *Les Soirées de Neuilly?*" inquired Pradel, who was an ardent collector of old books and a great reader. "What, you have not read *Les Soirées de Neuilly,* by Monsieur de Fongeray? You have missed something. It is a curious book, which can still be met with sometimes on the quays. It is adorned by a lithograph of Henry Monnier's, which is, I don't know why, a caricature of Stendhal. Fongeray is the pseudonym of two Liberals of the Restoration, Dittmer and Cavé. The work consists of comedies and dramas which cannot be acted, but which contain some most interesting scenes representing manners and customs. You will read in it how, in the reign of Charles X, a vicar of one of the Paris churches, the Abbé Mouchaud, would refuse burial to a pious lady, and would, at all costs, grant it to an atheist. Madame d'Hautefeuille was religious, but she held some national property. At her death, she received the ministrations of a Jansenist priest. For this reason, after her death, the Abbé Mouchaud refused to receive her into the church in which she had passed her life. At the same time, in the same parish, Monsieur Dubourg, a big banker, was good enough to die. In his will he stipulated that he should be borne straight to the

cemetery. 'He is a Catholic,' reflected the Abbé Mouchaud, 'he belongs to us.' Quickly making a parcel of his stole and surplice, he rushed off to the dead man's house, administered extreme unction, and brought him into his church."

"Well," replied Constantin Marc, "that vicar was an excellent politician. Atheists are not formidable enemies of the Church. They do not count as adversaries. They cannot raise a Church against her, and they do not dream of doing so. Atheists have existed at all times among the heads and princes of the Church, and many of them have rendered signal services to the Papacy. On the other hand, whoever does not submit strictly to ecclesiastical discipline and breaks away from tradition upon a single point, whoever sets up a faith against the faith, an opinion, a practice, against the accepted opinion and the common practice, is a factor of disorder, a menace of peril, and must be extirpated. This the vicar Mouchaud understood. He should have been made a Cardinal."

Madame Doulce, who had been clever enough not to tell everything in a breath, went on to say:

"I did not allow myself to be discomfited by the opposition of Monsieur le Curé. I begged, I entreated. And his answer was: 'We owe respectful obedience to the Ordinary. Go to the Archbishop's Palace. I will do as Monseigneur

bids me.' There is nothing left for me but to follow this advice. I'm hurrying off to the Archbishop's Palace."

"Let us get to work," said Pradel.

Romilly called to Nanteuil:

"Nanteuil! Come, Nanteuil, begin your whole scene over again."

And Nanteuil said once more:

" 'Cousin, I was so happy when I awoke this morning . . .' "

CHAPTER IX

HE prominence given by the Press to the suicide of the Boulevard de Villiers rendered the negotiations between the Stage and the Church all the more difficult. The reporters had given the fullest details of the event, and it was pointed out by the Abbé Mirabelle, the Archbishop's second vicar, that to open the doors of the parish church to Chevalier, as matters then stood, was to proclaim that excommunicated persons were entitled to the prayers of the Church.

But for that matter, Monsieur Mirabelle himself, who in this affair displayed great wisdom and circumspection, paved the way to a solution.

"You must fully understand," he observed to Madame Doulce, "that the opinion of the newspapers cannot affect our decision. We are absolutely indifferent to it, and we do not disturb ourselves in the slightest degree, no matter what fifty public sheets may say about the unfortunate young fellow. Whether the journalists have told the truth or distorted it is their affair, not mine. I do not know

and I do not wish to know what they have written. But the fact of the suicide is notorious. You cannot dispute it. It would now be advisable to investigate closely, and by the light of science, the circumstances in which the deed was committed. Do not be surprised by my thus invoking the aid of science. Science has no better friend than religion. Now medical science may in the present case be of great assistance to us. You will understand in a moment. Mother Church ejects the suicide from her bosom only when his act is an act of despair. The madmen who attempt their own lives are not those who have lost all hope, and the Church does not deny them her prayers; she prays for all who are unfortunate. Now, if it could be proved that this poor boy had acted under the influence of a high fever or of a mental disorder, if a medical man were in a position to certify that the poor fellow was not in possession of his faculties when he slew himself with his own hand, there would be no obstacle to the celebration of a religious service."

Having hearkened to the words of Monsieur l'Abbé Mirabelle, Madame Doulce hastened back to the theatre. The rehearsal of *La Grille* was over. She found Pradel in his office with a couple of young actresses, one of whom was soliciting an engagement, the other, leave of absence. He refused, in conformity with his principle never to

grant a request until he had first refused it. In this way he bestowed a value upon his most trifling concessions. His glistening eyes and his patriarchal beard, his manner, at once amorous and paternal, gave him a resemblance to Lot, as we see him between his two daughters in the prints of the Old Masters. Standing on the table was an amphora of gilt pasteboard which fostered this illusion.

"It can't be done," he was telling each of them. "It really can't be done, my child—— Well, after all, look in to-morrow."

Having dismissed them, he inquired, as he signed some letters:

"Well, Madame Doulce, what news do you bring?"

Constantin Marc, appearing with Nanteuil, hastily exclaimed:

"What about my scenery, Monsieur Pradel?"

Thereupon he described for the twentieth time the landscape, upon which the curtain ought to rise.

"In the foreground, an old park. The trunks of the great trees, on the north side, are green with moss. The dampness of the soil must be felt."

And the manager replied:

"You may rest assured that everything that can be done will be done, and that it will be most appropriate. Well, Madame Doulce, what news?"

"There is a glimmer of hope," she replied.

"At the back, in a slight mist," said the author, "the grey stones and the slate roofs of the Abbaye-aux-Dames."

"Quite so. Pray be seated, Madame Doulce; you have my attention."

"I was most courteously received at the Archbishop's Palace," said Madame Doulce.

"Monsieur Pradel, it is imperative that the walls of the Abbaye should appear inscrutable, of great thickness, and yet subtilized by the mists of coming night. A pale-gold sky——"

"Monsieur l'Abbé Mirabelle," resumed Madame Doulce, "is a priest of the highest distinction——"

"Monsieur Marc, are you particularly keen on your pale-gold sky?" inquired the stage manager. "Go on, Madame Doulce, go on, I am listening to you."

"And exquisitely polite. He made a delicate allusion to the indiscretions of the newspapers——"

At this moment Monsieur Marchegeay, the stage manager, burst into the room. His green eyes were glittering, and his red moustache was dancing like a flame. The words rolled off his tongue:

"They are at it again! Lydie, the little super, is screaming like a stoat on the stairs. She says Delage tried to violate her. It's at least the tenth

time in a month that she has come out with that story. This is an infernal nuisance!"

"Such conduct cannot be tolerated in a house like this," said Pradel. "You'll have to fine Delage. Pray continue, Madame Doulce."

"Monsieur l'Abbé Mirabelle explained to me in the clearest manner that suicide is an act of despair."

But Constantin Marc was inquiring of Pradel with interest, whether Lydie, the little super, was pretty.

"You have seen her in *La Nuit du 23 octobre;* she plays the woman of the people who, in the Plain de Grenelle, is buying wafers of Madame Ravaud."

"A very pretty girl, to my thinking," said Constantin Marc.

"Undoubtedly," responded Pradel. "But she would be still prettier if her ankles weren't like stakes."

And Constantin Marc musingly replied:

"And Delage has outraged her. That fellow possesses the sense of love. Love is a simple and primitive act. It's a struggle, it's hatred. Violence is necessary to it. Love by mutual consent is merely a tedious obligation."

And he cried, greatly excited:

"Delage is prodigious!"

"Don't get yourself into a fix," said Pradel,

"This same little Lydie entices my actors into her dressing-room, and then all of a sudden she screams out that she is being outraged in order to get hush-money out of them. It's her lover who has taught her the trick, and takes the coin. You were saying, Madame Doulce——"

"After a long and interesting conversation," resumed Madame Doulce, "Monsieur l'Abbé Mirabelle suggested a favourable solution. He gave me to understand that, in order to remove all difficulties, it would be sufficient for a physician to certify that Chevalier was not in full possession of his faculties, and that he was not responsible for his acts."

"But," observed Pradel, "Chevalier wasn't insane. He was in full possession of his faculties."

"It's not for us to say," replied Madame Doulce. "What do we know about it?"

"No," said Nanteuil, "he was not in full possession of his faculties."

Pradel shrugged his shoulders.

"After all, it's possible. Insanity and reason, it's a matter of appreciation. To whom could we apply for a certificate?"

Madame Doulce and Pradel called to mind three physicians in succession; but they were unable to find the address of the first; the second was bad-tempered, and it was decided that the third was dead.

Nanteuil suggested that they should approach Dr. Trublet.

"That's an idea!" exclaimed Pradel. "Let us ask a certificate of Dr. Socrates. What's to-day? Friday. It's his day for consultations. We shall find him at home."

Dr. Trublet lived in an old house at the top of the Rue de Seine. Pradel took Nanteuil with him, with the idea that Socrates would refuse nothing to a pretty woman. Constantin Marc, who could not live, when in Paris, save in the company of theatrical folk, accompanied them. The Chevalier affair was beginning to amuse him. He found it theatrical, that is, appropriate to theatrical performers. Although the hour for consultations was over, the doctor's sitting-room was still full of people in search of healing. Trublet dismissed them, and received his theatrical friends in his private room. He was standing in front of a table encumbered with books and papers. An adjustable arm-chair, infirm and cynical, displayed itself by the window. The director of the Odéon set forth the object of his call, and ended by saying:

"Chevalier's funeral service cannot be celebrated in the church unless you certify that the unfortunate young man was not altogether sane."

Dr. Trublet declared that Chevalier might very well do without a religious service.

"Adrienne Lecouvreur, who was of more account than Chevalier, did without one. Mademoiselle Monime had no Mass said for her after her death, and, as you are aware, she was denied 'the honour of rotting in a nasty cemetery in the company of all the beggars of the quarter.' She was none the worse off for that."

"You are not ignorant of the fact, Dr. Socrates," replied Pradel, "that actors and actresses are the most religious of people. My company would be deeply grieved if they could not be present at the celebration of a Mass for their colleague. They have already secured the co-operation of several lyric artists, and the music will be very fine."

"Now that's a reason," said Trublet. "I do not gainsay it. Charles Monselet, who was a witty fellow, was reflecting, only a few hours before his death, on his musical Mass. 'I know a great many singers at the Opéra,' he said. 'I shall have a *Pie Jésu aux truffes.*' But, as on this occasion the Archbishop does not authorize a spiritual concert, it would be more convenient to postpone it to some other occasion."

"As far as I am concerned," replied the director, "I have no religious belief. But I consider that the Church and the Stage are two great social powers, and that it is beneficial that they should be friends and allies. For my own part, I never lose

an opportunity of sealing the alliance. This coming Lent, I shall have Durville read one of Bourdaloue's sermons. I receive a State subsidy. I must observe the Concordat. Moreover, whatever people may say, Catholicism is the most acceptable form of religious indifference."

"Well then," objected Constantin Marc, "since you wish to show deference to the Church, why do you foist upon her, by force or by subterfuge, a coffin which she doesn't want?"

The doctor spoke in a similar strain, and ended by saying.

"My dear Pradel, don't you have anything more to do with the matter."

Whereupon Nanteuil, her eyes blazing, her voice sibilant, cried:

"He must go to church, doctor; sign what is asked of you, write that he was not in possession of his faculties, I entreat you."

There was not religion alone at the back of this desire. Blended with it was an intimate feeling, an obscure background of old beliefs, of which she herself was unaware. She hoped that if he were carried into the church, and sprinkled with holy water, Chevalier would be appeased, would become one of the peaceful dead, and would no longer torment her. She feared, on the other hand, that if he were deprived of benediction and prayers he

would perpetually hover about her, accursed and maleficent. And, more simply still, in her dread of seeing him again, she was anxious that the priests should take good care to bury him, and that everybody should attend the funeral, so that he should be all the more thoroughly buried; as thoroughly buried, in short, as it was possible to be. Her lips trembled and she wrung her hands.

Trublet, who had long graduated in human nature, watched her with interest. He understood and took a special interest in the female of the human machine. This particular specimen filled him with joy. His snub-nosed face beamed with delight as he watched her.

"Don't be uneasy, child. There is always a way of coming to an understanding with the Church. What you are asking me is not within my powers; I am a lay doctor. But we have to-day, thank God, religious physicians who send their patients to the ecclesiastical waters, and whose special function is to attest miraculous cures. I know one who lives in this part of the town; I'll give you his address. Go and see him; the Bishop will refuse him nothing. He will arrange the matter for you."

"Not at all," said Pradel. "You always attended poor Chevalier. It is for you to give a certificate."

Romilly agreed:

"Of course, doctor. You are the physician to the theatre. We must wash our dirty linen at home."

At the same time, Nanteuil turned upon Socrates a gaze of entreaty.

"But," objected Trublet, "what do you want me to say?"

"It's very simple," Pradel replied. "Say that he was to a certain extent irresponsible."

"You are simply asking me to speak like a police surgeon. It's expecting too much of me."

"You believe then, doctor, that Chevalier was fully and entirely morally responsible?"

"Quite the contrary. I am of the opinion that he was not in the least responsible for his actions."

"Well, then?"

"But I also consider that, in this respect, he differed in nowise from you, myself, and all other men. My judicial colleagues distinguish between individual responsibilities. They have procedures by which they recognize full responsibilities, and those which lack one or more fractional parts. It is a remarkable fact, moreover, that in order to get a poor wretch condemned they always find him fully responsible. May we not therefore consider that their own responsibility is full—like the moon?"

And Dr. Socrates proceeded to unfold before

the astonished stage folk a comprehensive theory of universal determinism. He went back to the origins of life, and, like the Silenus of Virgil, who, smeared with the juice of mulberries, sang to the shepherds of Sicily and the naiad Aglaia of the origin of the world, he broke out into a flood of words:

"To call upon a poor wretch to answer for his actions! Why, even the solar system was still no more than a pale nebula, forming, in the ether, a fragile halo, whose circumference was a thousand times greater than the orbit of Neptune, we had all of us, for ages past, been fully conditioned, determined and irrevocably destined, and your responsibility, my dear child, my responsibility, Chevalier's, and that of all men, had been, not mitigated, but abolished beforehand. All our movements, the result of previous movements of matter, are subject to the laws which govern the cosmic forces, and the human mechanism is merely a particular instance of the universal mechanism."

Pointing to a locked cupboard, he proceeded:

"I have there, contained in bottles, that which would transform, destroy, or excite to frenzy the will of fifty thousand men."

"Wouldn't be playing the game," objected Pradel.

"I agree, it wouldn't be playing the game.

But these substances are not essentially laboratory products. The laboratory combines, it does not create anything. These substances are scattered throughout nature. In their free state, they surround and enter into us, they determine our will: they circumscribe our freedom of device, which is merely the illusion engendered within us by the ignorance of our determinations."

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Pradel, taken aback.

"I mean that our will is an illusion caused by our ignorance of the causes which compel us to exert our will. That which wills within us is not ourselves, but myriads of cells of prodigious activity, of which we know nothing, which are unaware of us, which are ignorant of one another, but nevertheless constitute us. By means of their restlessness they produce innumerable currents which we call our passions, our thoughts, our joys, our sufferings, our desires, our fears, and our will. We believe that we are our own masters, while a mere drop of alcohol stimulates, and then benumbs the very elements by which we feel and will."

Constantin Marc interrupted the physician:

"Excuse me! Since you are speaking of the action of alcohol, I should like your advice on the subject. I am in the habit of drinking a small

glass of Armagnac brandy after each meal. That's not too much, is it?"

"It's a great deal too much. Alcohol is a poison. If you have a bottle of brandy at home, fling it out of the window."

Pradel was pondering. He considered that in suppressing will and responsibility in all human things Dr. Socrates was doing him a personal injury.

"You may say what you like. Will and responsibility are not illusions. They are tangible and powerful realities. I know how the terms of my contract bind me, and I impose my will on others."

And he added with some bitterness:

"I believe in the will, in moral responsibility, in the distinction between good and evil. Doubtless these are, according to you, stupid ideas."

"They are indeed stupid ideas," replied the physician, "but they are very suitable to us, since we are mere animals. We are for ever forgetting this. They are stupid, venerable, wholesome ideas. Men have felt that, without these ideas, they would all go mad. They had only the choice between stupidity and madness. Very reasonably they chose stupidity. Such is the foundation of moral ideas."

"What a paradox!" exclaimed Romilly.

The physician calmly proceeded:

"The distinction between good and evil in human societies has never emerged from the grossest empiricism. It was constituted in a wholly practical spirit and as a simple convenience. We do not trouble ourselves about it where cut-glass or a tree is concerned. We practise moral indifference with regard to animals. We practise it in the case of savage races. This enables us to exterminate them without remorse. That's what is known as the colonial policy. Nor do we find that believers exact a high degree of morality from their god. In the present state of society, they would not willingly admit that he was lecherous or compromised himself with women; but they do think it fitting that he should be vindictive and cruel. Morality is a mutual agreement to keep what we possess: land, houses, furniture, women, and our lives. It does not imply, in the case of those who bow to it, any particular intelligence or character. It is instinctive and ferocious. Written law follows it closely, and is in more or less harmonious agreement with it. Hence we see that great-hearted men, or men of brilliant genius, have almost all been accused of impiety, and, like Socrates, the son of Phenaretes, and Benoît Malon, have been smitten by the tribunals of their country. And it may be stated that a man who has not, at

the very least, been sentenced to imprisonment does little credit to the land of his father."

"There are exceptions," remarked Pradel.

"Few," replied Dr. Trublet.

But Nanteuil, pursuing her idea, remarked:

"My little Socrates, you can very well certify that he was insane. It is the truth. He was not sane. I know it only too well."

"No doubt he was mad, my dear child. But it is a question of determining whether he was madder than other men. The entire history of humanity, replete with tortures, ecstasies, and massacres, is the history of raving, demented creatures."

"Doctor," inquired Constantin Marc, "are you by chance one of those who do not admire War? It is nevertheless a magnificent thing, when you come to think of it. The animals merely eat one another. Men have conceived the idea of beautiful massacres. They have learnt to kill one another in glittering cuirasses, in helmets topped with plumes, or maned with scarlet. By the use of artillery, and the art of fortification, they have introduced chemistry and mathematics among the necessary means of destruction. War is a sublime invention. And, since the extermination of human beings appears to us the only object of life, the wisdom of man resides in this, that he has made

this extermination a delight and a splendour. After all, doctor, you cannot deny that murder is a law of nature, and that it is consequently divine."

To which Dr. Socrates replied:

"We are only miserable animals, and yet we are our own providence and our own gods. The lower animals, whose immemorial reign preceded our own upon this planet, have transformed it by their genius and their courage. The insects have traced roads, excavated the soil, hollowed the trunks of trees and rocks, built dwellings, founded cities, metamorphosed the soil, the air, and the waters. The labour of the humblest of these, that of the madrepores, has created islands and continents. Every material change produces a moral change, since morals depend upon environment. The transformation to which man in his turn has subjected the earth is undoubtedly more profound and more harmonious than the transformation wrought by other animals. Why should not humanity succeed in changing nature to the extent of making it pacific? Why should not humanity, miserably puny though it is and will be, succeed, some day, in suppressing, or at least in controlling the struggle for life? Why indeed should not humanity abolish the law of murder? We may expect a great deal from chemistry. Yet I do not guarantee anything. It is possible that our race

will persist in melancholy, delirium, mania, dementia, and stupor until its lamentable end amid ice and darkness. This world is perhaps irremediably wicked. At all events, I shall have got plenty of amusement out of it. It affords those who are in it an interesting spectacle, and I am beginning to think that Chevalier was madder than the rest in that he voluntarily left his seat."

Nanteuil took a pen from the desk, and held it out, dipped in ink, to the doctor.

He began to write:

"Having been called on several occasions to attend——"

He interrupted himself to ask Chevalier's Christian name.

"Aimé," replied Nanteuil.

"Aimé Chevalier, I have noticed in his system certain disorders of sensibility, vision and motor control, ordinary indications of——"

He went to fetch a book from the shelf of his library.

"It's a thousand chances that I shall find something to confirm my diagnosis in the lectures of Professor Ball on mental diseases."

He turned over the leaves of the book.

"Just see, my dear Romilly, this is what I find to begin with; in the eighteenth lecture, page 389: 'Many madmen are to be met with among actors.'

This remark of Professor Ball's reminds me that the celebrated Cabanis one day asked Dr. Esprit Blanche whether the stage was not a cause of madness."

"Really?" asked Romilly uneasily.

"Not a doubt of it," replied Trublet. "But listen to what Professor Ball says on the same page: 'It is an incontestable fact that medical men are excessively predisposed to mental aberration.' Nothing is truer. Among medical men, those who are more especially predestined to insanity are the alienists. It is often difficult to determine which of the two is the crazier, the madman or his doctor. People say too that men of genius are prone to insanity. That is certainly the case. Still, a man is not a reasoning being merely because he is an idiot."

After glancing a little further through the pages of Professor Ball's lectures, he resumed his writing:

"Ordinary indications of maniacal excitement, and, if it be taken into consideration that the subject was of a neuropathic temperament, there is reason to believe that his constitution predosposed him to insanity, which, according to the highest authorities, is merely an exaggeration of the habitual temperament of the individual, and hence it is not possible to credit him with full moral responsibility."

He signed the sheet and handed it to Pradel, saying:

"Here's something that is innocuous and too devoid of meaning to contain the slightest falsehood."

Pradel rose and said:

"Believe me, my dear doctor, we should not have asked you to tell a lie."

"Why not? I am a medical man. I keep a lie-shop. I relieve, I console. How is it possible to relieve and console without lying?"

Then, with a sympathetic glance at Nanteuil, he added:

"Only women and physicians know how necessary untruthfulness is, and how beneficial to man."

And, as Pradel, Constantin Marc, and Romilly were taking their leave, he said:

"Pray go out by the dining-room. I've just received a small cask of old Armagnac. You'll tell me what you think of it!"

Nanteuil had remained behind in the doctor's consulting-room.

"My little Socrates, I have spent an awful night. I saw him."

"During your sleep?"

"No, when wide awake."

"You are sure you were not sleeping?"

"Quite sure."

He was on the point of asking her if the apparition had spoken to her. But he left the question

unspoken, fearing lest he might suggest to so sensitive a subject those hallucinations of the sense of hearing which, by reason of their imperious nature, he dreaded far more than visual hallucinations. He was familiar with the docility of the sick in obeying orders given them by voices. Abandoning the idea of questioning Félicie, he resolved, at all hazards, to remove any scruples of conscience which might be troubling her. At the same time, having observed that, generally speaking, the sense of moral responsibility is weak in women, he made no great effort in that direction, and contented himself with remarking lightly:

"My dear child, you must not consider yourself responsible for the death of that poor fellow. A suicide inspired by passion is the inevitable termination of a pathological condition. Every individual who commits suicide had to commit suicide. You are merely the incidental cause of an accident, which is, of course, deplorable, but the importance of which should not be exaggerated."

Thinking that he had said enough on this score, he applied himself immediately to dispersing the terrors which surrounded her. He sought to convince her by simple arguments that she was beholding images which had no reality, mere reflections of her own thoughts. In order to illustrate

his demonstration, he told her a story of a reassuring nature:

"An English physician," he told her, "was attending a lady, like yourself, highly intelligent, who, like yourself, was in the habit of seeing cats under her furniture, and was visited by phantoms. He convinced her that these apparitions corresponded to nothing in reality. She believed him, and worried herself no longer. One fine day, after a long period of retirement, she reappeared in society, and on entering a drawing-room she saw the lady of the house who, pointing to an arm-chair, begged her to be seated. She also saw, seated in this chair, a crafty-looking old gentleman. She argued to herself that one of the two persons was necessarily a creature of the imagination, and, deciding that the gentlemen had no real existence, she sat down on the arm-chair. On touching the bottom, she drew a long breath. From that day onward, she never again set eyes on any further phantoms, either of man or of beast. When smothering the crafty-looking old gentleman, she had smothered them all—fundamentally."

Félicie shook her head, saying:

"That does not apply to this case."

She meant to say that her own phantom was not a grotesque old man, on whom one could sit, but a jealous dead man who did not pay her visits with-

out some object. But she feared to speak of these things, and, letting her hands fall upon her knees, she held her peace.

Seeing her thus, dejected and crushed, he pointed out that these disorders of the vision were neither rare nor very serious, and that they soon vanished without leaving any traces.

"I myself," he said, "once had a vision."

"You?"

"Yes. I had a vision some twenty years ago. It was in Egypt."

He noticed that she was looking at him inquiringly, so he began the story of his hallucination, having switched on all the electric lights, in order to disperse the phantoms of darkness.

"In the days when I was practising in Cairo, I was accustomed, in the February of each year, to go up the Nile as far as Luxor, and thence I proceeded, in company with some friends, to visit the tombs and temples in the desert. These trips across the sands are made on donkey-back. The last time I went to Luxor I hired a young donkey-boy, whose white donkey Rameses was stronger than the others. This donkey-boy, whose name was Selim, was also stronger, slenderer, and better looking than the other donkey-boys. He was fifteen years old. His shy, gentle eyes shone from behind a magnificent veil of long black lashes; his brown face

was a pure clear-cut oval. He tramped barefoot through the desert with a step which made one think of those dances of warriors of which the Bible speaks. His every movement was graceful; his young animal-like gaiety was charming. As he prodded Rameses' back with the point of his stick, he would chatter to me in a limited vocabulary in which English, French and Arabic were intermingled; he enjoyed telling me of the travellers whom he had escorted and who, he believed, were all princes or princesses; but if I asked him about his relations or his companions he remained silent, and assumed an air of indifference and boredom. When cadging for a promise of substantial baksheesh, the nasal twang of his voice assumed caressing inflexions. He thought out subtle stratagems and expended whole treasuries of prayers in order to obtain a cigarette. Noticing that I liked to see the donkey-boys treat their beasts with kindness, he used, in my presence, to kiss Rameses on the nostrils, and when we halted he would waltz with him. He often displayed real ingenuity in getting what he wanted. But he was far too short-sighted ever to show the slightest gratitude for what he had obtained. Greedy of piastres, he coveted still more eagerly such small glittering articles as one cannot keep covered—gold scarf-pins, rings, sleeve-links, or nickel cigar-lighters; and when he saw a gold

chain his face would light up with a gleam of pleasure.

"The following summer was the hardest time of my life. An epidemic of cholera had broken out in Lower Egypt. I was running about the town all day long in a scorching atmosphere. Cairo summers are overpowering to Europeans. We were going through the hottest weeks I had ever known. I heard one day that Selim, brought before the native court of Cairo, had been sentenced to death. He had murdered the daughter of some fellaheen, a little girl nine years old, in order to rob her of her ear-rings, and had thrown her into a cistern. The rings, stained with blood, had been found under a big stone in the Valley of the Kings. They were the crude jewels which the Nubian nomads hammer out of shillings or two-franc pieces. I was told that Selim would certainly be hanged, because the little girl's mother refused the tendered blood-money. Now, the Khedive does not enjoy the prerogative of mercy, and the murderer, according to Moslem law, can redeem his life only if the parents of the victim consent to receive from him a sum of money as compensation. I was too busy to give thought to the matter. I could readily imagine that Selim, cunning but thoughtless, caressing yet unfeeling, had played with the little girl, torn off her ear-rings, killed her, and hidden her

body. The affair soon passed out of my mind. The epidemic was spreading from Old Cairo to the European quarters. I was visiting from thirty to forty sick persons daily, practising venous injections in every case. I was suffering from liver trouble, anæmia was playing havoc with me, and I was dropping with fatigue. In order to husband my strength, I took a little rest at noon. I was accustomed, after luncheon, to lie down in the inner courtyard of my house, and there for an hour I bathed myself in the African shade, as dense and cool as water. One day, as I was lying there on a divan in my courtyard, just as I was lighting a cigarette, I saw Selim approaching. With his beautiful bronze arm he lifted the door-curtain, and came towards me in his blue robe. He did not speak, but smiled with his shy and innocent smile, and the deep red of his lips disclosed his dazzling teeth. His eyes, beneath the blue shadow of his eyelashes, shone with covetousness while gazing at my watch which lay on the table.

"I thought he had escaped. And this surprised me, not because captives are strictly watched in Oriental prisons, where men, women, horses and dogs are herded in imperfectly closed courtyards, and guarded by a soldier armed with a stick. But Moslems are never tempted to flee from their fate. Selim knelt down with an appealing grace, and

approached his lips to my hand, to kiss it according to ancient custom. I was not asleep, and I had proof of it. I also had proof that the apparition had been before me only for a short time. When Selim had vanished I noticed that my cigarette, which was alight, was not yet tipped with ash."

"Was he dead when you saw him?" asked Nanteuil.

"Not a bit of it," replied the doctor. "I heard a few days later that Selim, in his jail, wove little baskets, or played for hours at a time with a chaplet of glass balls, and that he would smilingly beg a piastre of European visitors, who were surprised by the caressing softness of his eyes. Moslem justice is slow. He was hanged six months later. No one, not even himself, was greatly concerned about it. I was in Europe at the time."

"And since then he has never reappeared?"

"Never."

Nanteuil looked at him, disappointed.

"I thought he had come when he was dead. But since he was in prison you certainly could not have seen him in your house. You only thought you saw him."

The physician, understanding what was in Félicie's mind, quickly replied:

"My dear little Nanteuil, believe what I tell

you. The phantoms of the dead have no more reality than the phantoms of the living."

Without attending to what he was saying, she asked him if it was really because he suffered from his liver that he had a vision. He replied that he believed that the bad state of his digestive organs, general fatigue, and a tendency to congestion, had all predisposed him to behold an apparition.

"There was, I believe," he added, "a more immediate cause. Stretched out on my divan, my head was very low. I raised it to light a cigarette, and let it fall back immediately. This attitude is particularly favourable to hallucinations. It is sometimes enough to lie down with one's head thrown back to see and to hear imaginary shapes and sounds. That is why I advise you, my child, to sleep with a bolster and a flat pillow.

She began to laugh.

"As mamma does—majestically!"

Then, flitting off to another idea:

"Tell me, Socrates, how comes it that you saw this sordid individual rather than another? You had hired a donkey from him, and you were no longer thinking of him. And yet he came. Say what you like, it's queer."

"You ask me why it was he rather than another? It would be very hard for me to tell you. Our visions, bound up with our innermost

thoughts, often present their images to us; sometimes there is no connection between them, and they show us an unexpected figure."

He once more exhorted her not to allow herself to be frightened by phantoms.

"The dead do not return. When one of them appears to you, rest assured that what you see is a thing imagined by your brain."

"Can you," she inquired, "guarantee that there is nothing after death?"

"My child, there is nothing after death that could frighten you."

She rose, picked up her little bag and her part, and held out her hand to the doctor, saying:

"As for you, you don't believe in anything, do you, old Socrates?"

He detained her for a moment in the waiting-room, warned her to take good care of herself, to lead a quiet, restful life, and to take sufficient rest.

"Do you suppose that is easy in our profession? To-morrow I have a rehearsal in the green-room, and one on the stage, and I have to try on a gown, while to-night I am acting. For more than a year now I've been leading that sort of life."

CHAPTER X

NDER the great void reserved by the height of the roof for the upward flight of prayers the motley crowd of human beings was huddled together like a flock of sheep.

They were all there, at the foot of the catafalque surrounded by lights and covered with flowers: Durville, old Maury, Delage, Vicar, Destrée, Léon Clim, Valrosche, Aman, Regnard, Pradel, Romilly, and Marchegeay, the manager. They were all there, Madame Ravaud, Madame Doulce, Ellen Midi, Duvernet, Herschell, Falempin, Stella, Marie-Claire, Louise Dalle, Fagette, Nanteuil, kneeling, robed in black, like elegiac figures. Some of the women were reading their missals. Some were weeping. All of them brought to the coffin of their comrade at least the tribute of their heavy eyes and their faces pallid from the cold of the morning. Journalists, actors, playwrights, whole families of those artisans who gain their living by the theatre, and a crowd of curious onlookers filled the nave.

The choristers were uttering the mournful cries of the *Kyrie eleison;* the priest kissed the altar, turned towards the people and said:

"Dominus vobiscum."

Romilly, taking in the crowd at a glance, remarked:

"Chevalier has a full house."

"Just look at that Louise Dalle," said Fagette. "To look as though she's in mourning, she has put on a black mackintosh!"

A little to the back of the church, with Pradel and Constantin Marc, Dr. Trublet was, in subdued tones, according to his habit, delivering his moral homilies.

"Observe," he said, "that they are lighting, on the altar and about the coffin, in the guise of wax candles, diminutive night-lights mounted on billiard cues, and are hereby making an offering of lamp oil instead of virgin wax to the Lord. The pious men who dwell in the sanctuary have at all times been proved to defraud their God by these little deceptions. This observation is not my own; it is, I believe, Renan's."

The celebrant, standing on the epistle side of the altar, was reciting in a low voice:

"Nolumus autem vos ignorare fratres de dormientibus, ut non contristemini, sicut et cæteri qui spem non habent."

"Who is taking the part of Florentin?" inquired Durville of Romilly.

"Regnard: he'll be no worse in it than Chevalier."

Pradel plucked Trublet by the sleeve, and said:

"Dr. Socrates, I beg you to tell me whether, as a scientific man, as a physiologist, you see any serious objections to the immortality of the soul?"

He asked the question as a busy and practical man in need of personal information.

"You are doubtless aware, my dear friend," replied Trublet, "what Cyrano's bird said on this very subject. One day Cyrano de Bergerac heard two birds conversing in a tree. One of them said, 'The souls of birds are immortal.' 'There can be no doubt of it,' replied the other. 'But it is inconceivable that beings who possess neither bill nor feathers, who have no wings and walk on two legs, should believe that they, like the birds, have an immortal soul.' "

"All the same," said Pradel, "when I hear the organ, I am chockful of religious ideas."

"Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine."

The celebrated author of *La Nuit du 23 octobre* 1812 appeared in the church, and no sooner had he done so than he was everywhere at one and the same moment—in the nave, under the porch, and in

the choir. Like the *Diable boiteux,* he must, bestriding his crutch, have soared above the heads of the congregation, to pass as he did in the twinkling of an eye from Morlot, the deputy, who, being a freethinker, had remained in the parvis, to Marie-Claire kneeling at the foot of the catafalque.

At one and at the same moment he whispered into the ears of all a few nimble phrases:

"Pradel, can you imagine this fellow going and chucking his part, an excellent part, and running off to kill himself? A pumpkin-headed fool! Blows out his brains just two days before the first night. Compels us to replace him and sets us back a week. What an imbecile! A rotten bad egg. But we must do him justice; he could jump, and jump well, the animal. Well, my dear Romilly, we rehearse the new man to-day at two o'clock. See to it that Regnard has the script of his part, and that he knows how to climb on to the roof. Let us hope he won't kick the bucket on our hands like Chevalier. What if he, too, were to commit suicide! You needn't laugh. There's an evil spell on certain parts. Thus, in my *Marino Falieri,* the gondolier Sandro breaks his arm at the dress rehearsal. I am given another Sandro. He sprains his ankle on the first night. I am given a third; he contracts typhoid fever. My little Nanteuil, I'll entrust you with a magnificent rôle to

create when you get to the Français. But I have sworn by the great gods that I'll never again have a single play performed in this theatre."

And immediately, under the little door which shuts off the choir on the right hand side of the altar, showing his friends Racine's epitaph, which is let into the wall, like a Parisian thoroughly conversant with the antiquities of this city, he recalled the history of this stone; he told them how the poet had been buried in accordance with his desire at Port-Royal-des-Champs, at the foot of Monsieur Hamon's grave, and that, after the destruction of the abbey and the violation of the tombs, the body of Messire Jean Racine, the King's secretary, Groom of the Chamber, had been transferred, all unhonoured, to Saint-Étienne-du-Mont. And he told how the tombstone, bearing the inscription composed for Boileau, beneath the knight's crest and the shield with its swan argent, and done into Latin by Monsieur Dodart, had served as a flagstone in the choir of the little church of Magny-Lessart, where it had been discovered in 1808.

"There it is," he added. "It was broken in six pieces and the name Racine was effaced by the shoes of the peasants. The fragments were pieced together and the missing letters carved anew."

On this subject he expatiated with his customary

vivacity and diffusiveness, drawing from his prodigious memory a multitude of curious facts and amusing anecdotes, breathing life into history and endowing archæology with a living interest. His admiration and his wrath burst forth in swift and violent alternation in the solemnity of the church, and amid the pomp of the ceremony.

"I would give something to know, for instance, who were the stupid bunglers who set this stone in the wall. *Hic jacet nobilis vir Johannes Racine.* It is not true! They make honest Boileau's epitaph lie. The body of Racine is not in this spot. It was laid to rest in the third chapel on the left, as you enter. What idiots!" Then, suddenly calm, he pointed to Pascal's tombstone.

"That came here from the museum of the Petits-Augustins. No praise can be too great for Lenoir, who, in the days of the Revolution, collected and preserved."

Thereupon, he improvised a second lecture on lapidary archæology, even more brilliant than the first, transformed the history of Pascal's life into a terrible yet amusing drama, and vanished. In all, he had remained in the church for the space of ten minutes.

Over those heads full of worldly cares and profane desires the *Dies iræ* rumbled like a storm:

"Mors stupebit et natura,
Quum resurget creatura
Judicanti responsura."

"Tell me, Dutil, how could that little Nanteuil, who is pretty and intelligent, get herself mixed up with a dirty mummer like Chevalier?"

"Your ignorance of the feminine heart surprises me."

"Herschell was prettier when she was a brunette."

"Qui Mariam absolvisti
Et latronem exaudisti
Mihi quoque spem dedisti."

"I must be off to lunch."

"Do you know anyone who knows the Minister?"

"Durville is a has-been. He blows like a grampus."

"Put me in a little paragraph about Marie Falempin. I can tell you she was simply delicious in *Les Trois Magots.*"

"Inter oves locum presta
Et ab hædis me sequestra,
Statuens in parte dextra."

"So then, it is for Nanteuil's sake that he blew out his brains? A little ninny who isn't worth spanking!"

The celebrant poured the wine and the water into the chalice, saying:

"Deus qui humanæ substantiæ dignitatem mirabiliter condidisti. . . ."

"Is it really true, doctor, that he killed himself because Nanteuil wouldn't have any more to do with him?"

"He killed himself," replied Trublet, "because she loved another. The obsession of genetic images frequently determines mania and melancholia."

"You don't understand second-rate actors, Dr. Socrates," said Pradel. "He killed himself to cause a sensation, and for no other reason."

"It's not only second-rate actors," said Constantin Marc, "who suffer from an uncontrollable desire to attract attention to themselves at whatever cost. Last year, in the place where I live, Saint-Bartholomé, while a threshing-machine was at work, a thirteen-year-old boy shoved his arm into the gear; it was crushed up to the shoulder. The surgeon who amputated it asked him, as he was dressing his stump, why he mutilated himself like that. The boy confessed that it was to draw attention to himself."

Meanwhile, Nanteuil, with dry eyes and pursed lips, had fixed her eyes upon the black cloth with which the catafalque was covered, and was impatiently waiting until enough holy water, candles and Latin prayers should be bestowed upon the dead man for him to depart in peace. She had

seen him again the night before, and she thought he had returned because the priests had not yet bidden him to rest in peace. Then, reflecting that one day she, too, would die, and would, like him, be laid in a coffin, beneath a black pall, she shuddered with horror and closed her eyes. The idea of life was so strong within her that she pictured death as a hideous life. Afraid of death, she prayed for a long life. Kneeling, with bowed head, the voluptuous ashen cloud of her buoyant hair falling over her forehead, she, a profane penitent, was reading in her prayer-book words which reassured her, although she did not understand them:

"Lord Jesus Christ, King of Glory, deliver the souls of all the faithful dead from the pains of hell and from the depths of the bottomless pit. Deliver them from the lion's jaws. Let them not be plunged into hell, and let them not fall into the outer darkness, but suffer that St. Michael, the Prince of Angels, lead them to the holy light promised by Thee to Abraham and to his posterity."

At the Elevation of the Host the congregation, permeated by a vague impression that the mystery was becoming more sacred, ceased its private conversations, and assumed a certain appearance of reverent devotion. And as the organ fell silent all heads were bowed at the tinkling of a little

bell which was shaken by a child. Then, after the last Gospel, when, the service being over, the priest, attended by his acolytes, approached the catafalque to the chanting of the *Libera,* a sense of relief was experienced by the crowd, and they began to jostle one another a little in order to file past the coffin. The women, whose piety, grief and contrition were contingent upon their immobility and their kneeling posture, were at once recalled to their customary frame of mind by the movement and the encounters of the procession. They exchanged amongst themselves and with the men remarks relating to their profession.

"Do you know," said Ellen Midi to Falempin, "that Nanteuil is going to join the Comédie-Française?"

"It's not possible!"

"The contract is signed."

"How did she manage it?"

"Not by her acting, you may be sure," replied Ellen, who proceeded to relate a highly scandalous story.

"Take care," said Falempin, "she is just behind you."

"Yes, I see her! She's got a cheek of her own to show herself here, don't you think?"

Marie-Claire whispered an extraordinary piece of news into Durville's ear:

"They say he committed suicide. Well, there's not a word of truth in it. He didn't commit suicide at all. And the proof of it is that he is being buried with the rites of the Church."

"What then?" inquired Durville.

"Monsieur de Ligny surprised him with Nanteuil and killed him."

"Come, come!"

"I can assure you that I am accurately informed."

The conversations were becoming animated and familiar.

"So you are here, you wicked old sinner!"

"The box-office receipts are falling off already."

"Stella has succeeded in getting herself proposed by seventeen Deputies, nine of whom are members of the Budget Commission."

"Yet I told Herschell: 'That little Boucquet fellow isn't the man for you. What you need is a man of standing.' "

When the bier, borne by the undertaker's men, passed through the west door, the delicious rays of a winter sun fell on the faces of the women and the roses lying on the coffin. Grouped on either side of the parvis, a few young men from the great colleges sought the faces of celebrities; the little factory girls from the neighbouring workshops, standing in couples with arms round each other's

waists, contemplated the actresses' dresses. And standing against the porch on their aching feet, a couple of tramps, accustomed to living under the open sky, whether mild or sullen, slowly shifted their dejected gaze, while a college lad gazed with rapture at the fiery tresses which coiled like flames on the nape of Fagette's neck.

She had stopped on the topmost step in front of the doors, and was chatting with Constantin Marc and a few journalists:

" . . . Monsieur de Ligny? He danced attendance upon me long before he knew Nanteuil. He used to gaze upon me by the hour, with eager eyes, without daring to speak a word to me. I received him willingly enough, for his behaviour was perfect. It is only fair to say that his manners are excellent. He was as reserved as a man could be. At last, one day, he declared that he was madly in love with me. I told him that as he was speaking to me seriously I would do the same; that I was truly sorry to see him in such a state; that every time such a thing happened I was greatly upset by it; that I was a woman of standing, I had settled my life, and could do nothing for him. He was desperate. He informed me that he was leaving for Constantinople, that he would never return. He couldn't make up his mind either to remain or to go away. He fell ill. Nanteuil, who

thought I loved him and wanted to keep him, did all in her power to get him away from me. She flung herself at his head in the craziest fashion. I found her sometimes a trifle ridiculous, but, as you may imagine, I did not place any obstacle in her path. For his part, Monsieur de Ligny, with the object of inspiring me with regret, with vexation, or what not, perhaps in the hope of making me jealous, responded very visibly to Nanteuil's advances. And that is how they came to be together. I was delighted. Nanteuil and I are the best of friends."

Madame Doulce, hedged in on either side by the onlookers, came slowly down the steps, indulging herself in the illusion that the crowd was whispering, "That's Doulce!"

She seized Nanteuil as she was passing, pressed her to her bosom, and with a beautiful gesture of Christian charity enveloped her in her mantle, saying through her sobs:

"Try to pray, my child, and accept this medal. It has been blessed by the Pope. A Dominican Father gave it to me."

Madame Nanteuil, who was a little out of breath, but was growing young again since she had renewed her experience of love, was the last to come out. Durville pressed her hand.

"Poor Chevalier!" he murmured.

"His was not a bad character," answered Madame Nanteuil, "but he showed a lack of tact. A man of the world does not commit suicide in such a manner. Poor boy, he had no breeding."

The hearse began its journey in the colossal shadow of the Panthéon, and proceeded down the Rue Soufflet, which is lined on both sides with booksellers' shops. Chevalier's fellow-players, the employés of the theatre, the director, Dr. Socrates, Constantin Marc, a few journalists and a few inquisitive onlookers followed. The clergy and the actresses took their seats in the mourning coaches. Nanteuil, disregarding Madame Doulce's advice, followed with Fagette, in a hired coupé.

The weather was fine. Behind the hearse the mourners were conversing in familiar fashion.

"The cemetery is the devil of a way!"

"Montparnasse? Half an hour at the outside."

"Do you know Nanteuil is engaged at the Comédie-Française?"

"Do we rehearse to-day?" Constantin Marc inquired of Romilly.

"To be sure we do, at three o'clock, in the green room. We shall rehearse till five. I am playing to-night; I am playing to-morrow; on Sunday I play both afternoon and evening. Work is never over for us actors; one is always beginning over again; always putting one's shoulder to the wheel."

Adolphe Meunier, the poet, laying his hand on his shoulder, said:

"Everything going well, Romilly?"

"How are you getting on yourself, Meunier? Always rolling the rock of Sisyphus. That would be nothing, but success does not depend on us alone. If the play is bad and falls flat, all that we have put into it, our work, our talent, a bit of our own life, collapses with it. And the number of 'frosts' I've seen! How often the play has fallen under me like an old hack, and has chucked me into the gutter! Ah, if one were punished only for one's own sins!"

"My dear Romilly," replied Meunier sharply, "do you imagine that the fate of dramatic authors like myself does not depend as much upon the actors as upon ourselves? Do you think it never happens that actors, by their carelessness or clumsiness, ruin a work which was meant to reach the heights? And do not we also, like Cæsar's legionary, become seized with dismay and anguish at the thought that our fate is not assured by our own valour, but that it depends on those who fight beside us?"

"Such is life," observed Constantin Marc. "In every undertaking, everywhere and always, we pay for the faults of others."

"That is only too true," resumed Meunier, who had just seen his lyric drama, *Pandolphe et Clair-*

monde, come hopelessly to grief. "But the iniquity of it disgusts us."

"It should not disgust us in the least," replied Constantin Marc. "There is a sacred law which governs the world, which we are forced to obey, which we are proud to worship. It is injustice, holy injustice, august injustice. It is everywhere blessed under the name of happiness, fortune, genius and grace. It is a weakness not to acknowledge it and to venerate it under its true name."

"That's rather weird, what you have just said!" remarked the gentle Meunier.

"Think it over," resumed Constantin Marc. "You, too, belong yourself to the party of injustice, for you are striving for distinction, and you very reasonably want to throttle your competitors, a natural, unjust and legitimate desire. Do you know of anything more stupid or more odious than the sort of people we have seen demanding justice? Public opinion, which is not, however, remarkable for its intelligence and common sense, which nevertheless is not a superior sense, have felt that they constituted the precise contrary of nature, society and life."

"Quite so," said Meunier, "but justice——"

"Justice is nothing but the dream of a few simpletons. Injustice is the thought of God Himself. The doctrine of original sin would alone

suffice to make me a Christian, while the doctrine of grace embodies all truths divine and human."

"Then are you a believer?" asked Romilly respectfully.

"No, but I should like to be. I regard faith as the most precious possession which a man can enjoy in this world. At Saint-Bartholomé, I go to Mass every Sunday and feast day, and I have never once listened to the exposition of the Gospel by the *curé* without saying to myself: 'I would give all I possess, my house, my acres, my woods, to be as stupid as that animal there.'"

Michel, the young painter with the mystic's beard, was saying to Roger, the scene painter:

"That poor Chevalier was a man with ideas. But they were not all good ones. One evening, he walked into the *brasserie* radiant and transfigured, sat himself beside us, and twirling his old felt hat between his long red fingers, he cried: 'I have discovered the true manner of acting tragedy. Hitherto no one has realized how to act tragedy, no one, you understand!' And he told us what his discovery was. 'I've just come from the Chamber. They made me climb up to the amphitheatre. I could see the Deputies swarming like black insects at the bottom of a pit. Suddenly a stumpy little man mounted the tribune. He looked

as if he were carrying a sack of coals on his back. He threw out his arms and clenched his fists. By Jove, he was comical! He had a Southern accent, and his delivery was full of defects. He spoke of the workers, of the proletariat, of social justice. It was magnificent; his voice, his gestures gripped one's very bowels; the applause nearly brought the house down. I said to myself: "What he is doing, I'll do on the stage, and I'll do it better. I, a comic actor, will play tragedy. Great tragedy parts, if they are to produce their true effect, ought to be played by a comedian, but he must have a soul." ' The poor fellow actually thought that he had imagined a new form of art. 'You'll see,' he said."

At the corner of the Boulevard Saint-Michel, a journalist came up to Meunier and asked him:

"Is it true that Robert de Ligny was at one time madly in love with Fagette?"

"If he's in love with her, he hasn't been so long. Only a fortnight ago he asked me, in the theatre, 'Who is that little fair-haired woman?' and he pointed to Fagette."

"I cannot understand," said the chronicler of an evening paper to a chronicler of a morning paper, "what can be the origin of our mania for calumniating humanity. I am amazed, on the other hand, by the number of decent people I come across.

It is enough to make one incline to the belief that men are ashamed of the good they do, and that they conceal themselves when performing acts of devotion and generosity. Don't you think that is so?"

"As far as I am concerned," replied the chronicler of the morning paper, "every time I have opened a door by mistake—I mean this both literally and metaphorically—I have always come across some unsuspected baseness. Were society suddenly turned inside out like a glove, so that one could see the inside, we should all faint away with horror and disgust."

"Some time ago," said Roger to the painter Michel, "I used to know Chevalier's uncle on the Butte de Montmartre. He was a photographer who dressed like an astrologer. A crazy old fellow, always sending one customer the portrait of another. The customers used to complain. But not all of them. There were even some who thought the portraits were a good likeness."

"What has become of him?"

"He went bankrupt and hanged himself."

In the Boulevard Saint-Michel Pradel, who was walking beside Trublet, was still profiting by the opportunity of obtaining information as to the immortality of the soul and the fate of man after death. He obtained nothing that seemed to him sufficiently positive and repeated:

"I should like to know."

To which Dr. Socrates replied:

"Men were not made to know; men were not made to understand. They do not possess the necessary faculties. A man's brain is larger and richer in convolutions than that of a gorilla, but there is no essential difference between the two. Our highest thoughts and our most comprehensive systems will never be anything more than the magnificent extension of the ideas contained in the head of a monkey. We know more about the world than the dog does, and this flatters and entertains us; but it is very little in itself, and our illusions increase with our knowledge."

But Pradel was not listening. He was mentally rehearsing the speech which he had to deliver at Chevalier's grave.

When the funeral procession turned towards the shabby grass-plots which overflow the Avenue de l'Observatoire, the tram-cars, out of respect for the dead, made way for it.

Trublet remarked upon this.

"Men," he said, "respect death, since they rightly believe that, if it is respectable to die, every one is assured of being respectable in that, at least."

The actors were excitedly discussing Chevalier's death. Durville, mysteriously, and in a deep voice, disclosed the tragedy:

"It is not a case of suicide. It is a crime of passion. Monsieur de Ligny surprised Chevalier with Nanteuil. He fired seven revolver shots at him. Two bullets struck our unfortunate comrade in the head and the chest, four went wide, and the fifth grazed Nanteuil below the left breast."

"Is Nanteuil wounded?"

"Only slightly."

"Will Monsieur de Ligny be arrested?"

"The affair is to be hushed up, and rightly so. I have, however, the best authority for what I say."

In the carriages, too, the actresses were engaged in spreading various reports. Some felt sure it was a case of murder; others, one of suicide.

"He shot himself in the chest with a revolver," asserted Falempin. "But he only succeeded in wounding himself. The doctor said that if he had been attended to in time he might have been saved. But they left him lying on the floor, bathed in blood."

And Madame Doulce said to Ellen Midi:

"It has often been my fate to stand beside a deathbed. I always go down on my knees and pray. I at once feel myself invaded by a heavenly serenity."

"You are indeed fortunate!" replied Ellen Midi.

At the end of the Rue Campagne-Première, on

the wide grey boulevards, they became conscious of the length of the road which they had covered, and the melancholy nature of the journey. They felt that while following the coffin they had crossed the confines of life, and were already in the country of the dead. On their right stretched the yards of the marble-workers, the florists' shops which supplied wreaths for funerals, displays of potted flowers, and the economical furniture of tombs, zinc flower-stands, wreaths of immortelles in cement, and guardian angels in plaster. On their left, they could see behind the low wall of the cemetery the white crosses rising among the bare tops of the lime-trees, and everywhere, in the wan dust, they breathed death, commonplace, uniform death, under the administration of City and State, and poorly embellished by the pious hands of relations.

They passed between two massive pillars of stone surmounted by winged hour-glasses. The hearse advanced slowly on the gravel which creaked in the silence. It seemed, amid the homes of the dead, to be twice as tall as before. The mourners read the famous names on some of the tombs, or gazed at the statue of a young girl, seated, book in hand. Old Maury deciphered, in the inscriptions, the age of the deceased. Short lives, and even more lives of average duration, distressed him as being of ill omen. But, when he encountered those of the dead who were notable for the length of their

years, he joyfully drew from them the hope and probability of a long lease of life.

The hearse stopped in the middle of a side alley. The clergy and the women stepped out of the coaches. Delage received in his arms, from the top of the carriage steps, the worthy Madame Ravaud, who was getting a little ponderous, and of a sudden, half in jest, half in earnest, he made certain proposals to her. She was no longer young, having been on the stage for half a century. Delage, with his twenty-five years, looked upon her as prodigiously old. Yet, as he whispered into her ear, he felt excited, infatuated, he became sincere, he really desired her, out of perverse curiosity, because he wanted to do something extraordinary, and was certain that he would be able to do it, perhaps because of his professional instinct as a handsome youth, and, lastly, because, in the first place having asked for what he did not want, he began to want what he had asked for. Madame Ravaud, indignant but flattered, made good her escape.

The coffin was carried along a narrow path bordered with dwarf cypresses, amid a murmuring of prayers:

"In paradisum deducant te Angeli, in tuo adventu suscipiant te Martyres et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem, Chorus Angelorum te suscipiat et cum Lazaro, quondam paupere, æternam habeas requiem."

Soon there was no longer any visible path. It was necessary, in following the quickly vanishing coffin, the priests and the choristers, to scatter, striding over the recumbent tombstones, and slipping between the broken columns and upright slabs. They lost the coffin and found it again. Nanteuil evinced a certain eagerness in her pursuit of it, anxious and abrupt, her prayer-book in her hand, freeing her skirt as it caught on the railings, and brushing past the withered wreaths which left the heads of immortelles adhering to her gown. Finally, the first to reach the graveside smelt the acrid odour of the freshly turned soil, and from the heights of the neighbouring flagstones saw the grave into which the coffin was being lowered.

The actors had contributed liberally to the expenses of the funeral; they had clubbed together to buy for their comrade as much earth as he needed, two metres granted for five years. Romilly, on behalf of the actors of the Odéon, had paid the cemetery board 300 francs—to be exact, 301 fr. 80 centimes. He had even made plans for a monument, a broken stele with comedy masks suspended upon it. But no decision had been come to on this point.

The celebrant blessed the open grave. And the priest and the boy choristers murmured the responses:

"Requiem æternam dona ei, Domine."

"Et lux perpetua luceat ei."

"Requiescat in pace."

"Amen."

"Anima ejus et animæ omnium fidelium defunctorum, per misericordiam Dei, requiescat in pace."

"Amen."

"De profundis . . ."

Each one of those present came forward to sprinkle holy water on the coffin. Nanteuil stood watching it all, the prayers, the spadefuls of earth, the sprinkling; then, kneeling apart on the corner of a tomb, she fervently recited: "Our Father who art in heaven . . ."

Pradel spoke at the graveside. He refrained from making a speech. But the Théâtre de l'Odéon could not allow a young artist beloved of all to depart without a word of farewell.

"I shall speak, therefore, in the name of the great and true-hearted dramatic family, the words that are in every bosom."

Grouped about the speaker in studied attitudes, the actors listened with profound knowledge. They listened actively, with their ears, lips, eyes, arms, and legs. Each listened in his own manner, with nobility, simplicity, grief or rebelliousness, according to the parts which the actor was accustomed to play.

No, the director of the theatre would not suffer the valiant actor, who, in the course of his only too

brief career, had shown more than promise, to depart without a word of farewell.

"Chevalier, impetuous, uneven, restless, imparted to his creations an individual character, a distinctive physiognomy. We saw him a very few days ago—a few hours ago, I might say—bring an episodical character into powerful relief. The author of the play was struck by the performance. Chevalier was on the verge of success. The sacred flame was his. There are those who have asked, what was the cause of so cruel an end? Let us not seek for that cause. Chevalier died of his art; he died of dramatic fever. He died consumed by the flame which is slowly consuming all of us. Alas, the stage, of which the public sees only the smiles, and the tears, as sweet as the smiles, is a jealous master which demands of its servants an absolute devotion and the most painful sacrifices, and, at times, claims its victims. In the name of all your comrades, farewell, Chevalier, farewell!"

The handkerchiefs were at work, wiping away the mourners' tears. The actors were weeping with all sincerity; they were weeping for themselves.

After they had slipped away, Dr. Trublet, left alone in the cemetery with Constantin Marc, took in the multitude of graves with a glance.

"Do you remember," he said, "one of Auguste Comte's reflections: 'Humanity is composed of the

dead and the living. The dead are by far the more numerous.' Assuredly, the dead are by far the more numerous. By the multitudinous numbers and the magnitude of their work, they are more powerful. It's they who rule; we obey them. Our masters lie beneath these stones. Here is the lawgiver who made the law to which I submit to-day; the architect who built my house; the poet who created the illusions which still disturb us; the orator who swayed us before our birth. Here are all the artisans of our knowledge, true or false, of our wisdom and of our follies. There they lie, the inexorable leaders, whom we dare not disobey. In them dwells strength, continuity, and duration. What does a generation of living folk amount to, in comparison with the numberless generations of the dead? What is our will of a day before the will of a thousand centuries? Can we rebel against them? Why, we have not even time to disobey them!"

"At last you are coming to the point, Dr. Socrates!" said Constantin Marc. "You renounce progress, the new justice, the peace of the world, freedom of thought; you submit to tradition. You consent to the ancient error, the good old-fashioned ignorance, the venerable iniquity of our forbears. You withdraw into the French tradition, you submit to ancient custom, to the authority of our ancestors."

"Whence do you obtain custom and tradition?" asked Trublet. "Whence do you receive authority? There are irreconcilable traditions, diverse customs, and opposed authorities. The dead do not impose any one will upon us. They subject us to contradictory wills. The opinions of the past which weigh upon us are uncertain and confused. In crushing us they destroy one another. All these dead have lived, like ourselves, in the midst of disorder and contradiction. Each in his time, in his own fashion, in hatred or in love, has dreamed the dream of life. Let us in our turn dream this dream with kindness and joy, if it be possible, and let us go to lunch. I am taking you to a little tavern in the Rue Vavin, kept by Clémence, who cooks only one dish, but a marvellous one at that: the Castlenaudary *cassoulet,* not to be confused with the *cassoulet* prepared in the Carcassonne fashion, which is merely a leg of mutton with haricot beans. The *cassoulet* of Castlenaudary comprises pickled goose legs, haricot beans that have been previously bleached, bacon, and a small sausage. To be good, it must be cooked for a long time over a slow fire. Clémence's *cassoulet* has been cooking for twenty years. From time to time she puts in the saucepan, now a little bit of goose or bacon, now a sausage or some haricots, but it is always the same *cassoulet.* The stock remains, and this ancient and

precious stock gives it the flavour which, in the pictures of the old Venetian masters, one finds in the amber-coloured flesh of the women. Come, I want you to taste Clémence's *cassoulet*."

CHAPTER XI

AVING said her prayer, Nanteuil, without waiting to hear Pradel's speech, jumped into a carriage in order to join Robert de Ligny, who was waiting for her in front of the Montparnasse railway station. Amid the throng of passers-by they shook hands, gazing at one another without a word. More than ever did they feel that they were bound together. Robert loved her.

He loved her without knowing it. She was for him, or so he believed, merely one delight in the infinite series of possible delights. But delight had assumed for him the form of Félicie, and, had he reflected more deeply upon the innumerable women whom he promised himself in the vast remainder of his newly begun life, he would have recognized that now they were all Félicies. He might at least have realized that, without having any intention of being faithful to her, he did not dream of being unfaithful, and that since she had given herself to him he had not desired any other woman. But he did not realize it.

On this occasion, however, standing in the bustling commonplace square, on seeing her no longer in the voluptuous shadow of night, nor under the caressing glimmer of the alcove which gave her naked form the delicious vagueness of a Milky Way, but in a harsh, diffused daylight, by the circumstantial illumination of a sunlight devoid of splendour and without shadows, which revealed beneath her veil her eyelids that were seared with tears, her pearly cheeks and roughened lips, he realized that he felt for this woman's flesh a profound and mysterious inclination.

He did not question her. They exchanged only tender trivial phrases. And, as she was very hungry, he took her to lunch at a well-known *cabaret,* whose name shone in letters of gold on one of the old houses in the square. They had their meal served in the winter-garden, whose rockery, fountain, and solitary tree were multiplied by mirrors framed in a green trellis. When seated at the table, consulting the bill of fare, they conversed with less restraint than heretofore. He told her that the emotions and worries of the past three days had unstrung his nerves, but he no longer thought about it, and it would be absurd to worry about the matter any further. She spoke to him of her health, complaining that she could not sleep, save for a restless slumber full of dreams. But she did not tell him

what she saw in those dreams, and she avoided speaking of the dead man. He asked her if she had not spent a tiring morning, and why she had gone to the cemetery, a useless proceeding.

Incapable of explaining to him the depths of her soul, submissive to rites and propitiatory ceremonies and incantations, she shook her head as if to say: "Had to."

While those lunching at the adjoining tables were finishing their meal, they talked for a long time, both in subdued tones, while waiting to be served.

Robert had promised himself, had sworn indeed never to reproach Félicie for having had Chevalier for her lover, or even to ask her a single question in this connection. And yet, moved by some obscure resentment, by an ebullition of ill-temper or natural curiosity, and also because he loved her too deeply to control himself, he said to her, with bitterness in his voice:

"You were on intimate terms with him, formerly."

She was silent, and did not deny the fact. Not that she felt that it was henceforth useless to lie. On the contrary, she was in the habit of denying the obvious truth, and she had, of course, too much knowledge of men to be ignorant of the fact that, when in love, there is no lie, however clumsy, which

they cannot believe if they wish to do so. But on this occasion, contrary to her nature and habit, she refrained from lying. She was afraid of offending the dead. She imagined that in denying him she would be doing him a wrong, depriving him of his share, angering him. She held her peace, fearing to see him come and rest his elbows on the table, with his fixed smile and the hole in his head, and to hear him say in his plaintive voice: "Félicie, you surely cannot have forgotten our little room in the Rue des Martyrs?"

What he had become, for her, since his death, she could not have said, so alien was it to her beliefs, so contrary to her reason, and so antiquated, ridiculous and obsolete did the words which would have expressed her feeling seem to her. But from some remote inherited instinct, or more likely from certain tales which she had heard in her childhood, she derived a confused idea that he was of the number of those dead who in the days of old were wont to torment the living, and were exorcised by the priests; for upon thinking of him she instinctively began to make the sign of the cross, and she checked herself only that she might not seem ridiculous.

Ligny, seeing her melancholy and distracted, blamed himself for his harsh and useless words, while at the very moment of reproaching himself

for them he followed them by others equally harsh and equally useless:

"And yet you told me it was not true!"

She replied, fervently:

"Because, don't you see, I wanted it not to be true."

She added:

"Oh, my darling, since I've been yours, I swear to you that I've not belonged to anyone else. I don't claim any merit for this; I should have found it impossible."

Like the young of animals, she had need of gaiety. The wine, which shone in her glass like liquid amber, was a joy to her eyes, and she moistened her tongue with it with luxurious pleasure. She took an interest in the dishes set before her, and especially in the *pommes de terre soufflées,* like golden blisters. Next she watched the people lunching at the tables in the dining-room, attributing to them, according to their appearance, ridiculous opinions or grotesque passions. She noticed the ill-natured glances which the women directed toward her, and the efforts of the men to appear handsome and important. And she gave utterance to a general reflection:

"Robert, have you noticed that people are never natural? They do not say a thing because they think it. They say it because they think it is what

they ought to say. This habit makes them very wearisome. And it is extremely rare to find anyone who is natural. You, you are natural."

"Well, I don't think I'm guilty of posing."

"You pose like the rest. But you pose in your own character. I can see perfectly well when you are trying to surprise and impress me."

She spoke to him of himself, and, led back by an involuntary train of thought to the tragedy enacted at Neuilly, she inquired:

"Did your mother say anything to you?"

"No."

"Yet she must have known."

"It is probable."

"Are you on good terms with her?"

"Why, yes!"

"They say she is still very beautiful, your mother, is it so?"

He did not answer her and sought to change the conversation. He did not like Félicie to speak to him of his mother, or to turn her attention to his family. Monsieur and Madame de Ligny enjoyed the highest consideration in Parisian society. Monsieur de Ligny, a diplomatist by birth and by profession, was in himself a person worthy of the greatest consideration. He was so even before his birth, by virtue of the diplomatic services which his ancestors had rendered to France. His great-

grandfather had signed the surrender of Pondicherry to England. Madame de Ligny lived with her husband on the most correct terms. But, although she had no money of her own, she lived in great style, and her gowns were one of the greatest glories of France. She received intimate visits from an ex-Ambassador. His age, his position, his opinions, his titles, and his great fortune made the connection respectable. Madame de Ligny kept the ladies of the Republic at arm's length, and, when the spirit moved her, gave them lessons in decorum. She had nothing to fear from the opinion of the fashionable world. Robert knew that she was looked upon with respect by people in society. But he was continually dreading that, in speaking of her, Félicie might fail to do so with all the needful reserve. He feared lest, not being in society, she might say that which had better have been left unsaid. He was wrong; Félicie knew nothing of the private life of Madame de Ligny; moreover, had she known of it, she would not have blamed her. The lady inspired her with a naïve curiosity and an admiration mingled with fear. Since her lover was unwilling to speak to her of his mother, she attributed his reserve to a certain aristocratic arrogance, even to a lack of consideration for her, at which the pride of the freewoman and the plebeian was up in arms. She was wont to say to him tartly:

"I'm perfectly free to speak of your mother." The first time she had added: "Mine is just as good as yours." But she had realized that the remark was vulgar, and she had not repeated it.

The dining-room was now empty. She looked at her watch, and saw that it was three o'clock.

"I must be off," she said. "*La Grille* is being rehearsed this afternoon. Constantin Marc ought to be at the theatre already. There's another queer fellow for you! He boasts that when he's in the Vivarais he ruins all the women. And yet he is so shy that he daren't even talk to Fagette and Falempin. I frighten him. It amuses me."

She was so tired that she had not the courage to rise.

"Isn't it queer? They are saying everywhere that I'm engaged for the Français. It's not true. There's not even a question of it. Of course, I can't remain indefinitely where I am. In the long run one would get besotted there. But there is no hurry. I have a great part to create in *La Grille*. We shall see after that. What I want is to play comedy. I don't want to join the Français and then to do nothing."

Suddenly, gazing in front of her with eyes full of terror, she flung herself backwards, turned pale, and uttered a shrill scream. Then her eyelids fluttered, and she murmured that she could not breathe.

Robert loosened her jacket, and moistened her temples with a little water.

She spoke:

"A priest! I saw a priest. He was in his surplice. His lips were moving, but no sound came from them. He looked at me."

He tried to comfort her:

"Come now, my darling, how can you suppose that a priest, a priest in his surplice, would show himself in a restaurant?"

She listened obediently, and allowed herself to be persuaded.

"You are right, you are right, I know it well enough."

In that little head of hers allusions were soon dispelled. She was born two hundred and thirty years after the death of Descartes, of whom she had never heard; yet, as Dr. Socrates would have said, he had taught her the use of reason.

Robert met her at six o'clock after the rehearsal, under the arcades of the Odéon, and drove away with her in a cab.

"Where are we going?" she inquired.

He hesitated a little.

"You would not care to go back to our house out there?"

She cried out at the suggestion.

"Oh no! I couldn't! Oh, heavens, never!"

He replied that he had thought as much; that he would try to find something else: a little ground-floor flat in Paris; that in the meantime, just for to-day, they would content themselves with a chance abode.

She gazed at him with fixed, heavy eyes, drew him violently towards her, scorching his neck and ear with the breath of her desire. Then her arms fell away from him, and she sank back beside him, dejected and relaxed.

When the cab stopped, she said:

"You will not be vexed with me, will you, my own Robert, at what I am going to say? Not to-day—to-morrow."

She had considered it necessary to make this sacrifice to the jealous dead.

CHAPTER XII

N the following day, he took her to a furnished room, commonplace but cheerful, which he had selected on the first floor of a house facing the square, near the Bibliothèque Nationale. In the centre of the square stood the basin of a fountain supported by lusty nymphs. The paths, bordered with laurel and spindlewood, were deserted, and from this little-frequented spot one heard the vast and reassuring hum of the city. The rehearsal had finished very late. When they entered the room the night, already slower to arrive in this season of melting snow, was beginning to cast its gloom over the hangings. The large mirrors of the wardrobe and overmantel were filling with vague lights and shadows. She took off her fur coat, went to look out of the window between the curtains and said:

"Robert, the steps are wet."

He answered that there was no flight of steps, only the pavement and the road, and then another pavement and the railings of the square.

"You are a Parisian, you know this square well. In the centre, among the trees, there is a monumental fountain, with enormous women whose breasts are not as pretty as yours."

In his impatience he helped her to undo her cloth frock, but he could not find the hooks, and scratched himself with the pins.

"I am clumsy," he said.

She retorted laughingly:

"You are certainly not so clever as Madame Michon! It's not so much clumsiness, but you are afraid of getting pricked. Men are a cowardly race. As for women, they have to accustom themselves to suffer. It's true: to be a woman is to be nearly always ailing."

He did not notice that she was pale, with dark rings round her eyes. He desired her so ardently; he no longer saw her.

"They are very sensitive to pain," he said, "but they are also very sensitive to pleasure. Do you know Claude Bernard?"

"No."

"He was a great scientist. He said that he didn't hesitate to recognize woman's supremacy in the domain of physical and moral sensibility."

Nanteuil, unhooking her stays, replied:

"If he meant by that that all women are sensitive, he was indeed an old greenhorn. He ought

to have seen Fagette; he would soon have discovered whether it was easy to get anything out of her in the domain—how did he express it?—of physical and moral sensibility."

And she added with gentle pride:

"Don't you make any mistake, Robert, there's not such a heap of women like myself."

As he was drawing her into his arms, she released herself.

"You are hindering me."

Sitting down and doubling herself up in order to undo her boots, she continued:

"Do you know, Dr. Socrates told me the other day that he had seen an apparition. He saw a donkey-boy who had murdered a little girl. I dreamt of the story last night, only in my dream I could not make out whether the donkey-boy was a man or a woman. What a mix-up the dream was! Talking of Dr. Socrates, just guess whose lover he is—why, the lady who keeps the circulating library in the Rue Mazarine. She is no longer very young, but she is very intelligent. Do you think he is faithful to her? I'll take off my stockings, it's more becoming."

And she went on to tell him a story of the theatre:

"I really don't think I shall remain at the Odéon much longer."

"Why?"

"You'll see. Pradel said to me to-day, before rehearsal: 'My dear little Nanteuil, there has never been anything between us. It is ridiculous.' He was extremely decorous, but he gave me to understand that we were in a false position with regard to one another, which could not go on indefinitely. You must know that Pradel has established a rule. Formerly he used to pick and choose among his *pensionnaires*. He had favourites, and that caused an outcry. Nowadays, for the better administration of the theatre, he takes them all, even those he has no liking for, even those who are distasteful to him. There are no more favourites. Everything goes splendidly. Ah, he's a director all through, is Pradel!"

As Robert, in the bed, listened in silence, she went up to him and shook him:

"Then it's all the same to you if I carry on with Pradel?"

"No, my dear, it would not be all the same to me. But nothing I might say would prevent it."

Bending over him, she caressed him ardently, pretending to threaten and to punish him; and she cried:

"Then you don't really love me, that you are not jealous. I insist that you shall be jealous."

Then, suddenly, she moved away from him, and

hitching over her left shoulder her chemise, which had slipped down under her right breast, she loitered in front of the dressing-table and inquired uneasily:

"Robert, you have not brought anything here from the other room?"

"Nothing."

Thereupon, softly, timidly, she slipped into the bed. But hardly had she lain down when she raised herself from the pillow on her elbow, and, craning her neck, listened with parted lips. It seemed to her that she could hear slight sounds of footsteps along the gravel path which she had heard in the house in the Boulevard de Villiers. She ran to the window; she saw the Judas tree, the lawn, the garden gate. Knowing what she was yet to see, she sought to hide her face in her hands, but she could not raise her arms, and Chevalier's face rose up before her.

CHAPTER XIII

HE had returned home in a burning fever. Robert, after dining *en famille,* had retired to his attic. His nerves were on edge, and he was badly out of temper as a result of the manner in which Nanteuil had left him.

His shirt and his clothes, laid out on the bed by his valet, seemed to be waiting for him in a domestic and obsequious attitude. He began to dress himself with a somewhat ill-tempered alacrity. He was impatient to leave the house. He opened his round window, listened to the murmur of the city, and saw above the roofs the glow which rose into the sky from the city of Paris. He scented from afar all the amorous flesh gathered, on this winter's night, in the theatres and the great *cabarets,* the café-concerts and the bars.

Irritated by Félicie's denial of his desires, he had decided to satisfy them elsewhere, and as he was not conscious of any preference he believed that his only difficulty would be to make a choice; but he presently realized that he had no desire for any

of the women of his acquaintance, nor did he even feel any desire for an unknown woman. He closed his window, and seated himself before the fire.

It was a coke fire; Madame de Ligny, who wore cloaks costing a thousand pounds, was wont to economize in the matter of her table and her fires. She would not allow wood to be burned in her house.

He reflected upon his own affairs, to which he had so far given little or no thought; upon the career he had embraced, and which he beheld obscurely before him. The Minister was a great friend of his family. A mountaineer of the Cévennes, brought up on chestnuts, his dazzled eyes blinked at the flower-bedecked tables of Paris. He was too shrewd and too wily not to retain his advantage over the old aristocracy, which welcomed him to its bosom: the advantage of harsh caprices and arrogant refusals. Ligny knew him, and expected no favours at his hands. In this respect he was more perspicacious than his mother, who credited herself with a certain power over the dark, hairy little man, whom every Thursday she engulfed in her majestic skirts on the way from the drawing-room to the dinner-table. He judged him to be disobliging. And then something had gone wrong between them. Robert, as ill luck would have it, had forestalled his Minister in his intimacy with a

lady whom the latter loved to the verge of absurdity: Madame de Neuilles, a woman of easy virtue. And it seemed to him that the hairy little man suspected it, and regarded him with an unfriendly eye. And, lastly, the idea had grown upon him at the Quai d'Orsay that Ministers are neither able nor willing to do very much. But he did not exaggerate matters, and thought it quite possible that he might obtain a minor secretaryship. Such had been his wish hitherto. He was most anxious not to leave Paris. His mother, on the contrary, would have preferred that he should be sent to The Hague, where a post as third secretary was vacant. Now, of a sudden, he decided in favour of The Hague. "I'll go," he said. "The sooner the better." Having made up his mind, he reviewed his reasons. In the first place, it would be an excellent thing for his future career. Again, The Hague post was a pleasant one. A friend of his, who had held it, had enlarged upon the delightful hypocrisy of the sleepy little capital, where everything was engineered and "wrangled" for the comfort of the Diplomatic Corps. He reflected, also, that The Hague was the august cradle of a new international law, and finally went so far as to invoke the argument that he would be giving pleasure to his mother. After which he realized that he wanted to leave home solely on account of Félicie.

His thoughts of her were not benevolent. He knew her to be mendacious, timorous, and a malicious friend. He had proof that she was given to falling in love with actors of the lowest type, or, at all events, that she made shift with them. He was not certain that she did not deceive him, not that he had discovered anything suspect in the life which she was leading, but because he was properly distrustful of all women. He conjured up in his mind all the evil that he knew of her, and persuaded himself that she was a little jade, and, being conscious that he loved her, he believed that he loved her merely because of her extreme prettiness. This reason seemed to him a sound one; but on analysing it he perceived that it explained nothing; that he loved the girl not because she was exceedingly pretty, but because she was pretty in a certain uncommon fashion of her own; that he loved her for that which was incomparable and rare in her; because, in a word, she was a wonderful thing of art and voluptuousness, a living gem of priceless value. Thereupon, realizing how weak he was, he wept, mourning over his lost freedom, his captive mind, his disordered soul, the devotion of his very flesh and blood to a weak, perfidious little creature.

He had scorched his eyes by gazing at the coke fire behind the bars of the grate. He closed them in pain and, under his closed eyes, he saw negroes

leaping before him in an obscene and bloody riot. While he sought to remember from what book of travel, read in boyhood, these blacks emerged, he saw them diminish, resolve themselves into imperceptible specks, and disappear into a red Africa, which little by little came to represent the wound seen by the light of a match on the night of the suicide. He reflected:

"That fool of a Chevalier! Why, I was scarcely thinking of the fellow!"

Suddenly, against this background of blood and flame, appeared the slender form of Félicie, and he felt lurking within him a hot, cruel desire.

CHAPTER XIV

HE went to see her the following day, in the little flat in the Boulevard Saint-Michel. He was not in the habit of going thither. He did not particularly care to meet Madame Nanteuil; she bored him and embarrassed him, although she was extremely polite to him, even to obsequiousness.

It was she who received him in the little drawing-room. She thanked him for his interest in Félicie's health, and informed him that she had been restless and unwell the night before, but was now feeling better.

"She is in her bedroom, working at her part. I will tell her that you are here. She will be very glad to see you, Monsieur de Ligny. She knows that you are very fond of her. And true friends are rare, especially in the theatrical world."

Robert observed Madame Nanteuil with an attention which he had not hitherto bestowed upon her. He was trying to see in her face the face that would be her daughter's in years to come. When

walking in the street he was fond of reading, in the faces of the mothers, the love-affairs of the daughters. And on this occasion he assiduously deciphered the features and the figure of this woman as an interesting prophecy. He discovered nothing either of bad or good augury. Madame Nanteuil, plump, fresh-complexioned, cool-skinned, was not unattractive with the sensuous fullness of her contours. But her daughter did not in the least resemble her.

Seeing her so collected and serene, he said to her:

"You yourself are not of a nervous temperament?"

"I have never been nervous. My daughter does not take after me. She is the living image of her father. He was delicate, although his health was not bad. He died of a fall from his horse. You'll take a cup of tea, won't you, Monsieur de Ligny?"

Félicie entered the room. Her hair was outspread upon her shoulders; she was wrapped in a white woollen dressing-gown, held very loosely at the waist by a heavy embroidered girdle, and she shuffled along in red slippers; she looked a mere child. The friend of the house, Tony Meyer, the picture dealer, was wont when he saw her in this garment, which was a trifle monkish in appearance,

to call her Brother Ange de Charolais, because he had discovered in her a resemblance to a portrait by Nattier which represented Mademoiselle de Charolais in the Franciscan habit. Before this little girl, Robert was surprised and silent.

"It's kind of you," she said, "to have come to inquire after me. I am better, thank you."

"She works very hard; she works too hard," said Madame Nanteuil. "Her part in *La Grille* is tiring her."

"Oh no, mother."

They spoke of the theatre, and the conversation languished.

During a moment's silence, Madame Nanteuil asked Monsieur de Ligny if he were still collecting old fashion-prints.

Félicie and Robert looked at her without understanding. They had told her not long before some fiction about engraved fashion-plates, to explain the meetings which they had not been able to conceal. But they had quite forgotten the fact. Since then, a piece of the moon, as an old author has said, had fallen into their love; Madame Nanteuil alone, in her profound respect for fiction, remembered it.

"My daughter told me you had a great number of those old engravings and that she used to find ideas for her costumes in them."

"Quite so, madame, quite so."

"Come here, Monsieur de Ligny," said Félicie, "I want to show you a design for a costume for the part of Cécile de Rochemaure."

And she carried him off to her room.

It was a small room hung with flowered paper; the furniture consisted of a wardrobe with a mirror, a couple of chairs upholstered in horsehair, and an iron bedstead, with a white counterpane; above it was a bowl for holy water, and a sprig of boxwood.

She gave him a long kiss on the mouth.

"I do love you, do you know!"

"Quite sure?"

"Oh yes! And you?"

"I too, I love you. I wouldn't have believed that I could love you so!"

"Then it came afterwards."

"It always comes afterwards."

"That's true, what you've just said, Robert. Before—one doesn't know."

She shook her head.

"I was very ill yesterday."

"Have you seen Trublet? What did he say?"

"He told me that I needed rest, and quiet. My darling, we must be sensible for another fortnight. Do you mind?"

"I do."

"So do I. But what would you have?"

He strolled round the room two or three times, looking into every corner. She watched him with some little uneasiness, dreading lest he should ask her questions about her poor jewels and her cheap trinkets, which were modest enough as presents, but she could not in every case explain how she came to receive them. One may say anything one pleases, of course, but one may contradict oneself, and get into trouble, and that assuredly is not worth while. She diverted his attention.

"Robert, open my glove-box."

"What have you got in your glove-box?"

"The violets you gave me the first time. Darling, don't leave me! Don't go away. When I think that from one day to the next you may go to some foreign country, to London, to Constantinople, I feel crazy."

He comforted her, telling her that there had been some thought of sending him to The Hague. But he was determined not to go; he would get himself attached to the Minister's staff.

"You promise?"

He gave the promise in all sincerity. And she became quite cheerful.

Pointing to the little wardrobe with its looking-glass, she said:

"Look, darling, it's there that I study my part. When you came, I was working over my scene in

the fourth. I take advantage of being alone to try for the exact tone. I seek a broad, mellow effect. If I were to listen to Romilly I should mince my words, and the result would be wretched. I have to say: 'I do not fear you.' It's the great moment of the part. Do you know how Romilly would have me say: 'I do not fear you'? I'll show you. I am to raise my hand to my nose, open my fingers and speak one word to each finger separately, in a particular tone, with a special expression: 'I, do, not, fear, you,' as if I were exhibiting marionettes! It's a wonder he does not ask me to put a little paper hat on every finger. Subtle, intellectual, isn't it?"

Then, lifting her hair and uncovering her animated features, she said:

"I'll show you how I do it."

Suddenly transfigured, seeming of greater stature, she spoke the words with an air of ingenuous dignity and serene innocence:

"No, sir, I do not fear you. Why should I fear you? You thought to ensnare me, and you have placed yourself at my mercy. You are a man of honour. Now that I am under the shelter of your roof, you shall tell me what you told Chevalier d'Amberre, your enemy, when he entered that gate. You shall tell me: 'You are in your own house; I am yours to command.'"

She had the mysterious gift of changing her

soul and her very face. Ligny was under the spell of this beautiful illusion.

"You are marvellous!"

"Listen, pussy-cat. I shall wear a big lawn bonnet with lappets, one above the other, on either side of my face. You see, in the play I am a young girl of the Revolution. And it is imperative that I should make people feel it. I must have the Revolution *in* me, do you understand?"

"Are you well up in the Revolution?"

"Of course I am! I don't know the dates, to be sure. But I have the feeling of the period. For me, the Revolution means a bosom swelling with pride under a crossed neckerchief, knees enjoying full freedom in a striped petticoat, and a tiny blaze of colour on the cheek-bones. There you have it!"

He asked her questions about the play, and he realized that she knew nothing about it. She did not need to know anything about it. She divined, she found by instinct all that she needed from it.

"At rehearsals, I never give them a hint as to any of my effects. I keep them all for the public. It will make Romilly tear his hair. How stupid they'll all look! Fagette, my dear, will make herself ill over it."

She sat down on a little rickety chair. Her forehead, but a moment before as white as marble,

was rosy; she had once more assumed her cheeky flapper's expression.

He drew near to her, gazed into the fascinating grey of her eyes, and, as on the evening before, when she sat in front of his coke-fire, he reflected that she was untruthful and cowardly, and ill-natured toward her friends; but now the thought was tempered with indulgence. He reflected that she had love-affairs with actors of the lowest type, or that she at least made shift with them; but the thought was tempered with a gentle pity. He recalled all he evil that he knew of her, but without bitterness. He felt that he loved her, less because she was pretty than because she was pretty in her own fashion; in a word, that he loved her because she was a gem endowed with life, and an incomparable thing of art and voluptuousness. He looked into the fascinating grey of her eyes, into their pupils, where tiny astrological symbols seemed to float in a luminous tide. He gazed at her with a gaze so searching that she felt it pierce right through her. And, assured that he had seen right into her, she said to him, with her eyes on his, clasping his head between her two hands:

"Oh yes! I'm a rotten little actress; but I love you, and I don't care a rap for money. And there aren't many as good as me. And you know it well enough."

CHAPTER XV

HEY met daily at the theatre, and they went for walks together.

Nanteuil was playing almost every night, and was eagerly working at her part of Cécile. She was gradually recovering her peace of mind; her nights were less disturbed; she no longer made her mother hold her hand while she fell asleep and no longer found herself suffocating in nightmares. A fortnight went by in this fashion. Then, one morning, while sitting at her dressing-table, combing her hair, she bent her head toward the glass, as the weather was overcast, and she saw in it, not her own face, but the face of the dead man. A thread of blood was trickling from one corner of his mouth; he was smiling and gazing at her.

Thereupon she decided to do what she thought would be the proper and efficacious thing. She took a cab and drove off to see him. Going down the Boulevard Saint-Michel she bought a bunch of roses at her florist's. She took them to him. She went down on her knees before the tiny black

cross which marked the spot where they had laid him. She spoke to him, she begged him to be reasonable, to leave her in peace. She asked his forgiveness for having treated him formerly with harshness. People did not always understand one another in life. But now he ought to understand and forgive her. What good did it do to him to torment her? She asked no better than to retain a kindly memory of him. She would come and see him from time to time. But he must cease to persecute and frighten her.

She sought to flatter and soothe him with gentle phrases.

"I can understand that you wanted to revenge yourself. It was natural. But you are not wicked at heart. Don't be angry any more. Don't frighten me any more. Don't come to see me any more. I'll come to you; I'll come often. I'll bring you flowers."

She longed to deceive him, to soothe him with lying promises, to say to him: "Stay where you are; do not be restless any longer; stay where you are, and I swear to you that I will never again do anything to offend you; I promise to submit to your will." But she dared not lie over a grave, and she was sure that it would be useless, that the dead know everything.

A little wearied, she continued awhile, more

indolently, her prayers and supplications, and she realized that she no longer felt the horror with which the tombs had formerly inspired her; that she had no fear of the dead man. She sought the reason for this, and discovered that he did not frighten her because he was not there.

And she mused:

"He is not there; he is never there; he is everywhere except where they laid him. He is in the streets, in the houses, in the rooms."

And she rose to her feet in despair, feeling sure that henceforth she would meet him everywhere except in the cemetery.

CHAPTER XVI

FTER a fortnight's patience Ligny urged her to resume their former intercourse. The period which she herself had fixed had elapsed. He would not wait any longer. She suffered as much as he did in refusing herself to him. But she dreaded to see the dead man return. She found lame excuses for postponing appointments; at last she confessed that she was afraid. He despised her for displaying so little common sense and courage. He no longer felt that she loved him, and he spoke harshly to her, but he pursued her incessantly with his desire.

Bitter days and barren hours followed. As she no longer dared to seek the shelter of a roof in his company, they used to take a cab, and after driving for hours about the outskirts of the city they would alight in some gloomy avenue, wandering far down it under the bitter east wind, walking swiftly, as though chastised by the breath of an unseen wrath.

Once, however, the weather was so mild that it filled them with its soft languor. Side by side they

trod the deserted paths of the Bois de Boulogne. The buds, which were beginning to swell on the tips of the slender black branches, dyed the tree-tops violet under the rosy sky. To their left stretched the fields, dotted with clumps of leafless trees, and the houses of Auteuil were visible. Slowly driven coupés, with their elderly passengers, crawled along the road, and the wet-nurses pushed their perambulators. A motor-car broke the silence of the Bois with its humming.

"Do you like those machines?" asked Félicie.

"I find them convenient, that's all."

It was true that he was no chauffeur. He had no taste for any kind of sport; he concerned himself only with women.

Pointing to a cab which had just passed them, she exclaimed:

"Robert, did you see?"

"No."

"Jeanne Perrin was in it with a woman."

And, as he displayed a calm indifference, she added in a reproachful tone:

"You are like Dr. Socrates. Do you think that sort of thing natural?"

The lake slept, bright, and serene, within its sombre walls of pines. They took the path to their right, which skirted the bank where the white geese and swans were preening their feathers. At their

approach a flotilla of ducks, like living hulls, their necks curving like prows, set sail toward them.

Félicie told them, in a regretful tone, that she had nothing to give them.

"When I was little," she went on to say, "Papa used to take me out on Sundays to feed the animals. It was my reward for having learned my lessons well all the week. Papa used to delight in the country. He was fond of dogs, horses, all animals in fact. He was very gentle and very clever. He used to work very hard. But life is difficult for an officer who has no money of his own. It grieved him sorely not to be able to do as the wealthy officers did, and then he didn't hit it off with Mamma. Papa's life was not a happy one. He was often wretched. He didn't talk much; but we two understood one another without speaking. He was very fond of me. Robert, dearest, later on, in the distant future, the very distant future, I shall have a tiny house in the country. And when you come there, my beloved, you will find me in a short skirt, throwing corn to my fowls."

He asked her what gave her the idea of going on the stage.

"I knew very well that I'd never find a husband, since I had no dowry. And from what I saw of my older girl friends, working at dress-making or in a telegraph office, I was not encouraged to follow in

their steps. When I was quite a little girl I thought it would be nice to be an actress. I had once acted, at my boarding-school, in a little play, on St. Nicholas' Day. I thought it no end of a lark. The schoolmistress said I didn't act well, but that was because Mamma owed her for a whole term. From the time I was fifteen I began to think seriously about going on the stage. I entered the Conservatoire. I worked, I worked very hard. It's a back-breaking trade. But success brings rest."

Opposite the châlet on the island they found the ferry-boat moored to the landing. Ligny jumped into it, pulling Félicie after him.

"Those tall trees are lovely, even without leaves," she said. "But I thought the châlet was closed at this time of the year."

The ferryman told them that, on fine winter days, people out for a walk liked to visit the island, because they could enjoy quiet there, and that he had only just ferried a couple of ladies across.

A waiter, who was living amid the solitude of the island, brought them tea, in a rustic sitting-room, furnished with a couple of chairs, a table, a piano, and a sofa. The panelling was mildewed, the planks of the flooring had started. Félicie looked out of the window at the lawn and the tall trees.

"What is that," she asked, "that big dark ball on the poplar?"

"That's mistletoe, my pet."

"One would think it was an animal rolled round the branch, gnawing at it. It isn't nice to look at."

She rested her head on her lover's shoulder, saying in a languid tone:

"I love you."

He drew her down upon the sofa. She felt him, kneeling at her feet, his hands, clumsy with impatience, gliding over her, and she suffered his attempts, inert, discouraged, foreseeing that it was useless. Her ears were ringing like a little bell. The ringing ceased, and she heard, on her right, a strange clear, glacial voice say: "I forbid you to belong to one another." It seemed to her that the voice spoke from above, in the glow of light, but she did not dare to turn her head. It was an unfamiliar voice. Involuntarily and despite herself she tried to remember his voice, and she realized that she had forgotten its sound, and that she could never again remember it. The thought came to her: "Perhaps this is the voice he has now." Terrified, she swiftly pushed her skirt over her knees. But she refrained from crying out, and she did not speak of what she had just heard, lest she should be taken for a madwoman, and because she realized somehow that it was not real.

Ligny drew away from her.

"If you don't want anything more to do with me, say so honestly. I am not going to take you by force."

Sitting upright, with her knees pressed together, she told him:

"Whenever we are in a crowd, as long as there are people about us, I want you, I long for you; but as soon as we are by ourselves I am afraid."

He replied by a cheap, spiteful sneer:

"Ah, if you must have a public to stimulate you!"

She rose, and returned to the window. A tear was running down her cheek. She wept for some time in silence. Suddenly she called to him:

"Look there!"

She pointed to Jeanne Perrin, who was strolling on the lawn with a young woman. Each had an arm about the other's waist; they were giving one another violets to smell, and were smiling.

"See! That woman is happy; her mind at peace."

And Jeanne Perrin, tasting the peace of long-established habits, strolled along satisfied and serene, without even betraying any pride in her strange preference.

Félicie watched her with an interest which she did not confess to herself, and envied her her serenity.

"She's not afraid, that woman."

"Let her be! What harm is she doing us?"

And he caught her violently by the waist. She freed herself with a shudder. In the end, disappointed, frustrated, humiliated, he lost his temper, called her a silly fool, and swore that he would not stand her ridiculous way of treating him any longer.

She made no reply, and once more she began to weep.

Angered by her tears, he told her harshly:

"Since you can no longer give me what I ask you, it is useless for us to meet any more. There is nothing more to be said between us. Besides, I see that you have ceased to love me. And you would admit, if for once you could speak the truth, that you have never loved anyone except that wretched second-rate actor."

Then her anger exploded, and she moaned in despair:

"Liar! Liar! That's an abominable thing to say. You see I'm crying, and you want to make me suffer more. You take advantage of the fact that I love you to make me miserable. It's cowardly. Well, go then, I don't love you any longer. Go away! I don't want to see you again. Go! But it's true—what are we doing like this? Are we going to spend our lives staring at each

other like this, wild with each other, full of despair and rage? It is not my fault—I can't, I can't. Forgive me, darling, I love you, I worship you, I want you. Only drive him away. You are a man, you know what there is to do. Drive him away. You killed him, not I. It was you. Kill him altogether then—Oh God, I am going mad. I am going mad!"

. . . . . .

On the following day, Ligny applied to be sent as Third Secretary to The Hague. He was appointed a week later, and left at once, without having seen Félicie again.

CHAPTER XVII

ADAME NANTEUIL thought of nothing but her daughter's welfare. Her liaison with Tony Meyer, the picture-dealer in the Rue de Clichy, left her with plenty of leisure and an unoccupied heart. She met at the theatre a Monsieur Bondois, a manufacturer of electrical apparatus; he was still young, superior to his trade, and extremely well-mannered. He was blessed with an amorous temperament and a bashful nature, and, as young and beautiful women frightened him, he had accustomed himself to desiring only women who were not young and beautiful. Madame Nanteuil was still a very pleasing woman. But one night when she was badly dressed, and did not look her best, he made her the offer of his affections. She accepted him as something of a help toward housekeeping, and so that her daughter should want for nothing. Her devotion brought her happiness. Monsieur Bondois loved her, and courted her most ardently. At the outset this surprised her; then it brought her happiness and peace of mind; it

seemed to her natural and good to be loved, and she could not believe that her time for love was past when she was in receipt of proof to the contrary.

She had always displayed a kindly disposition, an easy-going character, and an even temper. But never yet had she revealed in her home so happy a spirit and such gracious thoughtfulness. Kind to others, and to herself, always preserving, in the lapse of changeful hours, the smile that disclosed her beautiful teeth and brought the dimples into her plump cheeks, grateful to life for what it was giving her, blooming, expanding, overflowing, she was the joy and the youth of the house.

While Madame Nanteuil conceived and gave expression to bright and cheerful ideas, Félicie was fast becoming gloomy, fretful, and sullen. Lines began to show in her pretty face; her voice assumed a grating quality. She had at once realized the position which Monsieur Bondois occupied in the household, and, whether she would have preferred her mother to live and breathe for her alone, whether her filial piety suffered because she was forced to respect her less, whether she envied her happiness, or whether she merely felt the distress which love affairs cause us when we are brought into too close contact with them, Félicie, more especially at meal-time, and every day, bitterly

reproached Madame Nanteuil, in very pointed allusions, and in terms which were not precisely veiled, in respect of this new "friend of the family"; and for Monsieur Bondois himself, whenever she met him, she exhibited an expressive disgust and an unconcealed aversion. Madame Nanteuil was only moderately distressed by this, and she excused her daughter by reflecting that the young girl had as yet no experience of life. And Monsieur Bondois, whom Félicie inspired with a superhuman terror, strove to placate her by signs of respect and inconsiderable presents.

She was violent because she was suffering. The letters which she received from The Hague inflamed her love, so that it was a pain to her. A prey to consuming visions, she was pining away. When she saw her absent friend too clearly her temples throbbed, her heart beat violently, and a dense increasing shadow would darken her mind. All the sensibility of her nerves, all the warmth of her blood, all the forces of her being flowed through her, sinking downwards, merging themselves in desire in the very depths of her flesh. At such times she had no other thought than to recover Ligny. It was Ligny that she wanted, only Ligny, and she herself was surprised at the disgust which she felt for all other men. For her instincts had not always been so exclusive. She told herself that

she would go at once to Bondois, ask him for money, and take the train for The Hague. And she did not do it. What deterred her was not so much the idea of displeasing her lover, who would have looked upon such a journey as bad form, as the vague fear of awakening the slumbering shadow.

That she had not seen since Ligny's departure. But perturbing things were happening, within her and around her. In the street she was followed by a water-spaniel, which appeared and vanished suddenly. One morning when she was in bed her mother told her: "I am going to the dressmaker's," and went out. Two or three minutes later Félicie saw her come back into the room as if she had forgotten something. But the apparition advanced without a look at her, without a word, without a sound, and disappeared as it touched the bed.

She had even more disturbing illusions. One Sunday, she was acting, in a matinée of *Athalie,* the part of young Zacharias. As she had very pretty legs she found the disguise not displeasing; she was glad also to show that she knew how verse should be spoken. But she noticed that in the orchestra stalls there was a priest wearing his cassock. It was not the first time that an ecclesiastic had been present at an afternoon performance

of this tragedy drawn from the Scriptures. Nevertheless, it impressed her disagreeably. When she went on the stage she distinctly saw Louise Dalle, wearing the turban of Jehoshabeath, loading a revolver in front of the prompter's box. She had enough common sense and presence of mind to reject this absurd vision, which disappeared. But she spoke her first lines in an inaudible voice.

She had burning pains in the stomach. She suffered from fits of suffocation; sometimes, without apparent cause, an unspeakable agony gripped her bowels, her heart beat madly and she feared that she must be dying.

Dr. Trublet attended her with watchful prudence. She often saw him at the theatre, and occasionally went to consult him at his old house in the Rue de Seine. She did not go through the waiting-room: the servant would show her at once into the little dining-room, where Arab potteries glinted in the shadows, and she was always the first to be shown in. One day Socrates succeeded in making her understand the manner in which images are formed in the brain, and how these images do not always correspond with external objects, or, at any rate, do not always correspond exactly.

"Hallucinations," he added, "are more often than not merely false perceptions. One sees a thing, but one sees it badly, so that a feather-broom

becomes a head of bristling locks, a red carnation is a beast's open mouth, and a chemise is a ghost in its winding-sheet. Insignificant errors."

From these arguments she derived sufficient strength to despise and dispel her visions of cats and dogs, or of persons who were living, and well known to her. Yet she dreaded seeing the dead man again; and the mystic terrors nestling in the obscure crannies of her brain were more powerful than the demonstrations of science. It was useless to tell her that the dead never returned; she knew very well that they did.

On this occasion Socrates once more advised her to find some distraction, to visit her friends, and by preference the more pleasant of her friends, and to avoid darkness and solitude, as her two most treacherous enemies.

And he added this prescription:

"Especially must you avoid persons and things which may be connected with the object of your visions."

He did not see that this was impossible. Nor did Nanteuil.

"Then you will cure me, dear old Socrates," she said, turning upon him her pretty grey eyes, full of entreaty.

"You will cure yourself, my child. You will cure yourself, because you are hard-working,

sensible, and courageous. Yes, yes, you are timid and brave at the same time. You dread danger, but you have the courage to live. You will be cured, because you are not in sympathy with evil and suffering. You will be cured because you want to be cured."

"You think then that one can be cured if one wills it?"

"When one wills it in a certain profound, intimate fashion, when it is our cells that will it within us, when it is our unconscious self that wills it; when one wills it with the secret, abounding, absolute will of the sturdy tree that wills itself to grow green again in the spring."

CHAPTER XVIII

HAT same night, being unable to sleep, she turned over in her bed, and threw back the bed-clothes. She felt that sleep was still far off, that it would come with the first rays, full of dancing atoms of dust, with which morning pierces the chinks between the curtains. The night-light, with its tiny burning heart shining through its porcelain shade, gave her a mystic and familiar companionship. Félicie opened her eyes and at a glance drank in the white milky glimmer which brought her peace of mind. Then, closing them once more, she relapsed into the tumultuous weariness of insomnia. Now and again a few words of her part recurred to her memory, words to which she attached no meaning, yet which obsessed her: "Our days are what we make them." And her mind wearied itself by turning over and over some four or five ideas.

"I must go to Madame Royaumont to-morrow, to try on my gown. Yesterday I went with Fagette to Jeanne Perrin's dressing-room; she was dressing,

and she showed her hairy legs, as if she was proud of them. She's not ugly, Jeanne Perrin; indeed, she has a fine head; but it is her expression that I dislike. How does Madame Colbert make out that I owe her thirty-two francs? Fourteen and three are seventeen, and nine, twenty-six. I owe her only twenty-six francs. 'Our days are what we make them.' How hot I feel!"

With one swift movement of her supple loins she turned over, and her bare arms opened to embrace the air as though it had been a cool, subtle body.

"It seems a hundred years since Robert went away. It was cruel of him to leave me alone. I am sick with longing for him." And curled up in her bed, she recollected intently the hours when they held each other in a close embrace. She called him:

"My pussy-cat! Little wolf!"

And immediately the same train of thoughts began once more their fatiguing procession through her mind.

" 'Our days are what we make them. Our days are what we make them. Our days . . .' Fourteen and three, seventeen, and nine, twenty-six. I could see quite plainly that Jeanne Perrin showed her long man's legs, dark with hair, on purpose. Is it true what they say, that Jeanne Perrin gives money

to women? I must try my gown on at four o'clock to-morrow. There's one dreadful thing, Madame Royaumont never can put in the sleeves properly. How hot I am! Socrates is a good doctor. But he does sometimes amuse himself by making you feel a stupid fool."

Suddenly she thought of Chevalier, and she seemed to feel an influence emanating from him which was gliding along the walls of her bedroom. It seemed to her that the glimmer of the night-light was dimmed by it. It was less than a shadow, and it filled her with alarm. The idea suddenly flashed through her mind that this subtle thing had its origin in the portraits of the dead man. She had not kept any of them in her bedroom. But there were still some in the flat, some that she had not torn up. She carefully reckoned them up, and discovered that there must still be three left: the first, when he was quite young, showed him against a cloudy background; another, laughing and at his ease, sitting astride of a chair; a third as Don Cæsar de Bazan. In her hurry to destroy every vestige of them she sprang out of bed, lit a candle, and in her nightgown shuffled along in her slippers into the drawing-room, until she came to the rose-wood table, surmounted by a phœnix palm. She pulled up the tablecloth and searched through the drawer. It contained card-counters, sockets for

candles, a few scraps of wood detached from the furniture, two or three lustres belonging to the chandelier and a few photographs, among which she found only one of Chevalier, the earliest, showing him standing against a cloudy background.

She searched for the other two in a little piece of Boule furniture which adorned the space between the windows, and on which were some Chinese lamps. Here slumbered lamp-globes of ground glass, lamp-shades, cut-glass goblets ornamented with gilt bronze, a match-stand in painted porcelain flanked by a child sleeping against a drum beside a dog, books whose bindings were detached, tattered musical scores, a couple of broken fans, a flute, and a small heap of carte-de-visite portraits. There she discovered a second Chevalier, the Don Cæsar de Bazan. The third was not there. She asked herself in vain where it could have been hidden away. Fruitlessly she hunted through boxes, bowls, flower-pot holders, and the music davenport. And while she was eagerly searching for the portrait, it was growing in size and distinctness in her imagination, attaining to a man's stature, was assuming a mocking air and defying her. Her head was on fire, her feet were like ice, and she could feel terror creeping into the pit of her stomach. Just as she was about to give up the search, about to go and bury her face in her pillow, she remembered that

her mother kept some photographs in her mirror-panelled wardrobe. She again took courage. Softly she entered the room of the sleeping Madame Nanteuil. With silent steps she crept over to the wardrobe, opened it slowly and noiselessly, and, standing on a chair, explored the top shelf, which was loaded with old cardboard boxes. She came upon an album which dated from the Second Empire, and which had not been opened for twenty years. She rummaged among a mass of letters, of bundles of receipts and Mont-de-Piété vouchers. Awakened by the light of the candle and by the mouse-like noise made by the seeker, Madame Nanteuil demanded:

"Who is there?"

Immediately, perceiving the familiar little phantom in her long nightgown, with a heavy plait of hair down her back, perched on a chair, she exclaimed:

"It's you, Félicie? You are not ill, are you? What are you doing there?"

"I am looking for something."

"In my wardrobe?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Will you kindly go back to your bed! You will catch cold. Tell me at least what you are looking for. If it's the chocolate, it is on the middle shelf next to the silver sugar-basin."

But Félicie had seized upon a packet of photographs, which she was rapidly turning over. Her impatient fingers rejected Madame Doulce, bedecked with lace; Fagette, radiant, her hair dissolving in its own brilliance; Tony Meyer, with close-set eyes and a nose drooping over his lips; Pradel, with his flourishing beard; Trublet, bald and snub-nosed; Monsieur Bondois, with timorous eyes and straight nose set above a heavy moustache. Although not in a mood to bestow any attention upon Monsieur Bondois, she gave him a passing glance of hostility, and by chance let a drop of candle-grease disfigure his nose.

Madame Nanteuil, who was now wide awake, could make nothing of her proceedings.

"Félicie, why on earth are you poking about in my wardrobe like that?"

Félicie, who at last held the photograph for which she had sought so assiduously, responded only by a cry of fierce delight and flew from the chair, taking with her her dead friend, and, inadvertently, Monsieur Bondois as well.

Returning to the drawing-room she crouched down by the fireplace, and made a fire of paper, into which she cast Chevalier's three photographs. She watched them blazing, and when the three bits of cardboard, twisted and blackened, had flown up the chimney, and neither shape nor substance was

left, she breathed freely. She really believed, this time, that she had deprived the jealous dead man of the material of his apparitions, and had freed herself from the dreaded obsession.

On picking up her candlestick she saw Monsieur Bondois, whose nose had disappeared beneath a round blob of white wax. Not knowing what to do with him she threw him with a laugh into the still flaming grate.

Returning to her room she stood before the looking-glass and drew her nightgown closely about her, in order to emphasize the lines of her body. A thought which occasionally flitted through her mind tarried there this time a little longer than usual.

She was wont to ask herself:

"Why is one made like that, with a head, arms, legs, hands, feet, chest, and abdomen? Why is one made like that and not otherwise? It's funny."

And at the moment the human form seemed to her arbitrary, fantastic, alien. But her astonishment was soon over. And, as she looked at herself, she felt pleased with herself. She was conscious of a keen deep-seated delight in herself. She bared her breasts, held them delicately in the hollow of her hands, looked at them tenderly in the glass, as if they were not a part of herself, but something

belonging to her, like two living creatures, like a pair of doves.

After smiling upon them, she went back to bed. Waking late in the morning she felt surprised for a moment at being alone in her bed. Sometimes, in a dream, she would divide herself into two beings, and, feeling her own flesh, she would dream that she was being caressed by a woman.

CHAPTER XIX

HE dress rehearsal of *La Grille* was called for two o'clock. As early as one o'clock Dr. Trublet had taken his accustomed place in Nanteuil's dressing-room.

Félicie, who was being dressed by Madame Michon, reproached her doctor with having nothing to say to her. Yet it was she who, preoccupied, her mind concentrated upon the part which she was about to play, was not listening to him. She gave orders that nobody should be allowed to come into her dressing-room. For all that, she received Constantin Marc's visit with pleasure, for she found him sympathetic.

He was getting excited. In order to conceal his agitation he made a pretence of talking about his woods in the Vivarais, and began to tell shooting stories and peasants' tales, which he did not finish.

"I am in a funk," said Nanteuil. "And you, Monsieur Marc, don't you feel qualms in the stomach?"

He denied feeling any anxiety. She insisted:

"Now confess that you wish it were all over."

"Well, since you insist, perhaps I would rather it were over."

Whereupon Dr. Socrates, with a simple expression and in a quiet voice, asked him the following question:

"Do you not believe that what must be accomplished has already been accomplished, and has been accomplished from all time?"

And without waiting for a reply he added:

"If the world's phenomena reach our consciousness in succession, we must not conclude from that that they are really successive, and we have still fewer reasons to believe that they are produced at the moment when we perceive them.

"That's obvious," said Constantin Marc, who had not listened.

"The universe," continued the doctor, "appears to us perpetually imperfect, and we are all under the illusion that it is perpetually completing itself. Since we perceive phenomena successively, we actually believe that they follow one another. We imagine that those which we no longer see are in the past, and those which we do not yet see are in the future. But it is possible to conceive beings built in such fashion that they perceive simultaneously what we regard as the past and the future. We may conceive beings who perceive

phenomena in a retrograde order, and see them unroll themselves from our future to our past. Animals disposing of space otherwise than ourselves, and able, for instance, to move at a speed greater than that of light, would conceive an idea of the succession of phenomena which would differ greatly from our own."

"If only Durville is not going to rag me on the stage!" exclaimed Félicie, while Madame Michon was putting on her stockings under her skirt.

Constantin Marc assured her that Durville did not even dream of any such thing, and begged her not to be uneasy.

And Dr. Socrates resumed his discourse.

"We ourselves, of a clear night, when we gaze at Spica Virginis, which is throbbing above the top of a poplar, can see at one and the same time that which was and that which is. And it may be said with equal truth that we see that which is and that which will be. For if the star, such as it appears to us, represents the past as compared with the tree, the tree constitutes the future as compared with the star. Yet the star, which, from afar, shows us its tiny, fiery countenance, not as it is to-day, but as it was in the time of our youth, perhaps even before our birth, and the poplar-tree, whose young leaves are trembling in the fresh night air, come together within us in the same moment of time, and to us

are present simultaneously. We say of a thing that it is in the present when we have a precise perception of it. We say that it is in the past when we preserve but an indistinct image of it. A thing may have been accomplished millions of years ago, yet if it makes the strongest possible impression upon us it will not be for us a thing of the past; it will be present. The order in which things revolve in the depths of the universe is unknown to us. We know only the order of our perceptions. To believe that the future does not exist, because we do not know it, is like believing that a book is not finished because we have not finished reading it."

The doctor paused for a moment. And Nanteuil, in the silence which followed, heard the sound of her heart beating. She exclaimed:

"Continue, my dear Socrates, continue, I beg you. If you only knew how much good you do me by talking! You think that I am not listening to a word you say. But it distracts me to hear you talking of far-away things; it makes me feel that there is something else besides my entrance; it prevents me from giving way to the blues. Talk about anything you like, but do not stop."

The wise Socrates, who had doubtless anticipated the benign influence which his speech was exerting over the actress, resumed his lecture:

"The universe is constructed inevitably as a

triangle of which two angles and one side are given. Future things are determined. They are from that moment finished. They are as if they existed. Indeed, they exist already. They exist to such a degree that we know them in part. And, if that part is infinitesimal in proportion to their immensity, it is none the less very appreciable in proportion to the part of accomplished things of which we can have any knowledge. It is permissible to say that, for us, the future is not much more obscure than the past. We know that generations will follow generations in labour, joy and suffering. I look beyond the duration of the human race. I see the constellations slowly changing in the heavens those forms of theirs which seem immutable; I see the Wain unharnessed from its ancient team, the shield of Orion broken in twain, Sirius extinguished. We know that the sun will rise to-morrow and that for a long time to come it will rise every morning amid the dense clouds or in light mists."

Adolphe Meunier entered discreetly on tiptoe.

The doctor grasped his hand warmly.

"Good-day, Monsieur Meunier. We can see next month's new moon. We do not see her as distinctly as to-night's new moon, because we do not know in what grey or ruddy sky she will reveal her old saucepan-lid over my roof, amid the stove-flues capped with pointed hats and romantic hoods, to the

gaze of the amorous cats. But this coming rising of the moon—if we were expert enough to know it in advance, in its most minute particulars, every one of which is essential, we should conceive as clear an idea of the night whereof I speak as of the night now with us; both would be equally present to us.

"The knowledge that we have of the facts is the sole reason which leads us to believe in their reality. We know that certain facts are bound to occur. We must therefore believe them to be real. And, if they are real, they are realized. It is therefore credible, my dear Constantin Marc, that your play has been played a thousand years ago, or half an hour ago, which comes absolutely to the same thing. It is credible that we have all been dead for some time past. Think it, and your mind will be at rest."

Constantin Marc, who had paid scant attention to his remarks and who did not perceive their relevance or their propriety, answered, in a somewhat irritable tone, that all that was to be found in Bossuet.

"In Bossuet!" exclaimed the indignant physician. "I challenge you to show me anything resembling it in his works. Bossuet knew nothing of philosophy."

Nanteuil turned to the doctor. She was wearing a big lawn bonnet with a tall round coif; it was bound tightly upon her head with a wide blue

ribbon, and its lappets, one above another, fell on either side of her face, shading her forehead and cheeks. She had transformed herself into a fiery blonde. Reddish-brown hair fell in curls about her shoulders. An organdie neckerchief was crossed over her bosom and held at the waist by a broad purple girdle. Her white and pink striped petticoat, which flowed as though wet and clinging from the somewhat high waist, made her appear very tall. She looked like a figure in a dream.

"Delage, too," she said, "rags one in the most rotten way. Have you heard what he did to Marie-Claire? They were playing together in *Les Femmes savantes*. He put an egg into her hand, on the stage. She couldn't get rid of it until the end of the act."

On hearing the call boy's summons she went downstairs, followed by Canstantin Marc. They heard the roar of the house, the mutterings of the monster, and it seemed to them that they were entering into the flaming mouth of the apocalyptic beast.

La Grille was favourably received. Coming at the end of the season, with little hope of a long run, it found favour with all. By the middle of the first act the public were conscious of the style, the poetry, and, here and there, the obscurities of the play. Thenceforward they respected it, pretended to enjoy

it, and wished they could understand it. They forgave the play its slight dramatic value. It was literary, and for once the style found acceptance.

Constantin Marc as yet knew no one in Paris. He had invited to the theatre three or four landed proprietors from the Vivarais, who sat blushing in the stalls in their white ties, rolled their round eyes, and did not dare to applaud. As he had no friends nobody dreamt of spoiling his success. And even in the corridors there were those who set his talent above that of other dramatists. Greatly excited, nevertheless, he wandered from dressing-room to dressing-room or collapsed into a chair at the back of the director's stage-box. He was worrying about the critics.

"Set your mind at rest," Romilly told him. "They will say of your play the good or bad things they think of Pradel. And for the time being they think more ill than good of him."

Adolphe Meunier informed him, with a pale smile, that the house was a good one, and that the critics thought the play showed very careful writing. He expected, in return, a few complimentary words concerning his *Pandolphe et Clarimonde.* But it did not enter Constantin Marc's head to vouchsafe them.

Romilly shook his head.

"We must look forward to slatings. Monsieur

Meunier knows it well. The press has shown itself ferociously unjust to him."

"Alas," sighed Meunier, "they will never say as many hard things about us as were said of Shakespeare and Molière."

Nanteuil had a great success, which was marked less by vociferous calls before the curtain than by the deeper and more discreet approval of discriminating playgoers. She had revealed qualities with which she had not hitherto been credited; purity of diction, nobility of pose, and a proud, modest grace.

On the stage, during the last interval, the Minister congratulated her in person. This was a sign that the public was favourably disposed, for Ministers never express individual opinions. Behind the Grand Master of the University pressed a flattering crowd of public officials, society folk, and dramatic authors. With arms extended toward her like pump-handles they all simultaneously assured her of their admiration. And Madame Doulce, stifled by their numbers, left on the buttons of the men's garments shreds of her countless adornments of cotton lace.

The last act was Nanteuil's triumph. She obtained better things from the public than tears and shouts. She won from all eyes that moist yet tearless gaze, from every breast that deep yet al-

most silent murmur, which beauty alone has power to compel.

She felt that she had grown immeasurably in a single instant, and when the curtain fell she whispered:

"This time I've done it!"

She was unrobing herself in her dressing-room, which was filled with baskets of orchids, bouquets of roses, and bunches of lilacs, when a telegram was brought to her. She tore it open. It was a message from The Hague containing these words:

"My heartfelt congratulations on your undoubted success—ROBERT."

Just as she finished reading it Dr. Trublet entered the dressing-room.

She flung her arms, burning with joy and fatigue, round his neck; she drew him to her warm moist bosom, and planted on his meditative Silenus-like face a smacking kiss from her intoxicated lips.

Socrates, who was a wise man, took the kiss as a gift from the gods, knowing full well that it was not intended for him, but was dedicated to glory and to love.

Nanteuil realized herself that in her intoxication she had perhaps charged her lips with too ardent a breath, for, throwing her arms apart, she exclaimed:

"It can't be helped! I am so happy!"

CHAPTER XX

T Easter an event of great importance increased her joy. She was engaged at the Comédie-Française. For some time past, without mentioning the subject, she had been trying for this engagement. Her mother had helped her in the steps she had taken. Madame Nanteuil was lovable now that she was loved. She now wore straight corsets and petticoats that she could display anywhere. She frequented the offices of the Ministry, and it is said that, being solicited by the deputy-chief of a department in the Beaux-Arts, she had yielded with very good grace. At least, so Pradel said.

He would exclaim joyfully:

"You wouldn't recognize her now, Mother Nanteuil! She has become most desirable, and I like her better than her little vixen of a daughter. She has a better disposition."

Like the rest of them, Félicie had disdained, despised, disparaged the Comédie-Française. She had said, as all the others did: "I should hardly

care to get into that house." And no sooner did she belong to it than she was filled with proud and joyful exultation. What increased her pleasure twofold was that she was to make her début in *L'École des Femmes.* She was already studying the part of Agnès with an obscure old professor, Monsieur Maxime, of whom she thought highly because he was acquainted with all the traditions of the stage. At night she was playing Cécile in *La Grille,* and she was living in a feverish turmoil of work when she received a letter in which Robert de Ligny informed her that he was returning to Paris.

During his stay at The Hague he had made certain experiments which had proved to him the strength of his love for Félicie. He had had women who were reported to be pretty and pleasing. But neither Madame Boumdernoot of Brussels, tall and fresh looking, nor the sisters Van Cruysen, milliners on the Vijver, nor Suzette Berger of the Folies-Marigny, then on tour through Northern Europe, had given him a sense of pleasure in its completeness. When in their company he had regretted Félicie, and had discovered that, of all women, he desired her alone. Had it not been for Madame Bourmdernoot, the sisters Van Cruysen, and Suzette Berger, he would never have known how priceless Félicie Nanteuil was to him.

If one must be literal it may be argued that he was unfaithful to her. That is the correct expression. There are others which come to the same thing and which are not such good form. But if one looks into the matter more closely he had not deceived her. He had sought her, he had sought her out of herself and had learned that he would find her in herself alone. In his futile wisdom he was almost angered and alarmed; he was uneasy at having to stake the multitude of his desires upon so slender a substance, in so unique and fragile a vessel. And he loved Félicie all the more because he loved her with a certain depth of rage and hatred.

On the very day of his arrival in Paris he made an appointment with her in a bachelor's flat, which a rich colleague in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had placed at his disposal. It was situated in the Avenue de l'Alma, on the ground-floor of an attractive-looking house, and consisted of a couple of small rooms hung with a design of suns with brown hearts and golden rays, which rose, uniform, peaceful, and shadowless on the cheerful wall. The rooms were modern in style; the furniture was of a pale green, decorated with flowering branches; its outlines followed the gentle curves of the liliaceous plants, and assumed something of the tender feeling of moist vegetation.

The cheval-glass leant slightly forward in its frame of bulbous plants of supple form, terminating in closed corollas, and in this frame the mirror had the coolness of water. A white bearskin lay stretched at the foot of the bed.

"You! You! It's you!" was all she could say.

She saw the pupils of his eyes shining and heavy with desire, and while she gazed at him a cloud gathered before her eyes. The subtle fire of her blood, the burning of her loins, the warm breath of her lungs, the fiery ardour of her face, were all blended in her mouth, and she pressed on her lover's lips a long, long kiss, a kiss pregnant with all these fires and as fresh as a flower in the dew.

They asked one another twenty things at a time, and their questions intermingled.

"Were you wretched, Robert, when you were away from me?"

"So you are making your début at the Comédie?"

"Is The Hague a pretty place?"

"Yes, a quiet little town. Red, grey, yellow houses, with stepped gables, green shutters, and geraniums at the windows."

"What did you do there?"

"Not much. I walked round the Vijver."

"You did not go with women, I should hope?"

"No, upon my word. How pretty you are, my darling! Are you well again now?"

"Yes, I am cured."

And in sudden entreaty she said:

"Robert, I love you. Do not leave me. If you were to leave me I know for certain I could never take another lover. And what would become of me? You know that I can't do without love."

He replied brusquely, in a harsh voice, that he loved her only too well, that he thought of nothing but of her.

"I'm going crazy with it."

His harshness delighted and reassured her better than the nerveless tenderness of oaths and promises could have done. She smiled and began to undress herself generously.

"When do you make your début at the Comédie?"

"This very month."

She opened her little bag, and took from it, together with her face-powder, her call for the rehearsal, which she held out to Robert. It was a source of unending delight to her to gaze admiringly at this document, because it bore the heading of the Comédie, with the remote and awe-inspiring date of its foundation.

"You see, I make my début as Agnès in *L'École des Femmes.*"

"It's a fine part."

"I believe you."

And, while she was undressing, the lines surged to her lips, and she whispered them:

"Moi, j'ai blessé quelqu'un? fis-je tout étonnée.
Oui, dit-elle, blessé; mais blessé tout de bon;
Et c'est l'homme qu-hier vous vîtes au balcon.
Las! qui pourrait, lui dis-je, en avoir été cause?
Sur lui, sans y penser, fis-je choir quelque chose?"

"You see, I have not grown thin."

"Non, dit-elle, vos yeux ont fait ce coup fatal,
Et c'est de leurs regards qu'est venu tout son mal."

"If anything, I am a little plumper, but not too much."

"Hé, mon Dieu! ma surprise est, fis-je, sans seconde;
Mes yeux ont-ils du mal pour en donner au monde?"

He listened to the lines with pleasure. If on the one hand he did not know much more of the literature of bygone days or of French tradition than his youthful contemporaries, he had more taste and more lively interests. And, like all Frenchmen, he loved Molière, understood him, and felt him profoundly.

"It's delightful," he said. "Now, come to me."

She let her chemise slip downwards with a calm and beneficent grace. But, because she wished to make herself desired, and because she loved comedy, she began Agnès' narrative:

"J'étais sur le balcon à travailler au frais,
Lorsque je vis passer sous les arbres d'auprès
Un jeune homme bien fait qui, rencontrant ma vue. . . ."

He called her, and drew her to him. She glided from his arms, and, advancing toward the mirror, she continued to recite and act before the glass:

"D'une humble révérence aussitôt me salue."

Bending her knee, at first slightly, then lower, then, with her left leg brought forward, and her right thrown back, she curtsied deeply.

"Moi, pour ne point manquer à la civilité,
Je fis la révérence aussi de mon côté. . . ."

He called her more urgently. But she dropped a second curtsy, the pauses of which she accentuated with amusing precision. And she went on reciting and dropping curtsies at the places indicated by the text and by the traditions of the stage.

"Soudain il me refait une autre révérence;
Moi, j'en refais de même une autre en diligence;
Et lui, d'une troisième aussitôt repartant,
D'une troisième aussi j'y repars à l'instant. . . ."

She executed every detail of stage business,

seriously and conscientiously, taking pains to give a perfect rendering. Her poses, some of which were disconcerting, requiring as they did a skirt to explain them, were almost all pretty, while all were interesting, inasmuch as they brought into relief the firm muscles under the soft envelope of a young body, and revealed at every movement correspondences and harmonies which are not commonly observed.

When clothing her nudity with the propriety of her attitudes and the ingenuousness of her expressions she was the incarnation, through mere chance and caprice, of a gem of art, an allegory of Innocence in the style of Allegrain or Clodion. And the great lines of the comedy rang out with delicious purity from this animated figurine. Robert, enthralled in spite of himself, suffered her to go on to the very end. What entertained him above all was that the most public of all things, a stage scene, should be presented to him in so private and secret a fashion. And, while watching the ceremonious actions of this girl in all her nudity, he was at the same time revelling in the philosophical pleasure of discovering how dignity is produced in the best social circles.

"Il passe, vient, repasse et toujours de plus belle
Me fait à chaque fois une révérence nouvelle;
Et moi qui tous ses tours fixement regardais,
Nouvelle révérence aussi je lui rendais. . . ."

In the meantime she admired in the mirror her freshly-budded breasts, her supple waist, her arms, a trifle slender, round and tapering, and her smooth, beautiful knees; and, seeing all this subservient to the fine art of comedy, she became animated and exalted; a slight flush, like rouge, tinted her cheeks.

"Tant que si sur ce point la nuit ne fût venue,
Toujours comme cela je me serais tenue,
Ne voulant point céder, ni recevoir l'ennui
Qu'il me pût estimer moins civile que lui. . . ."

He called to her from the bed, where he was lying on his elbow:

"Now come!"

Whereupon, full of animation and with heightened colour, she exclaimed:

"Don't you think that I, too, love you!"

She flung herself beside her lover. Supple and wholly surrendered, she threw back her head, offering to his kisses her eyes veiled with shadowy lashes and her half-parted lips, from which gleamed a moist flash of white.

Of a sudden she started to her knees. Her staring eyes were filled with unspeakable terror. A hoarse scream escaped from her throat, followed by a wail as long drawn out and gentle as an organ note. Turning her head, she pointed to the white fur spread out at the foot of the bed.

"There! There! He is lying there like a crouching dog, with a hole in his head. He is looking at me, with the blood trickling from the corner of his mouth."

Her eyes, wide open, rolled up, showing the whites. Her body stretched backward like a bow, and, when it had recovered its suppleness, she fell as if dead.

He bathed her temples with cold water, and brought her back to consciousness. In a childlike voice she whimpered that every joint in her body was broken. Feeling a burning sensation in the hollow of her hand, she looked, and saw that the palm was cut and bleeding.

She said:

"It's my nails, they've gone into my hand. See, my nails are full of blood!"

She thanked him tenderly for his ministrations, and apologized sweetly for causing him so much trouble.

"It was not for that you came, was it?"

She tried to smile, and looked around her.

"It's nice, here."

Her gaze met the call to rehearsal lying open on the bedside table, and she sighed:

"What is the use of my being a great actress if I am not happy?"

Without realizing it, she was repeating word

for word what Chevalier had said when she rejected his advances.

Then, raising her still stupefied head from the pillow in which it had lain buried, she turned her mournful eyes toward her lover, and said to him resignedly:

"We did indeed love each other, we two. It is over. We shall never again belong to each other; no, never. He forbids it!"

THE END

THE RED LILY

BY ANATOLE FRANCE

A TRANSLATION BY
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THE RED LILY

I

HE looked round at the arm-chairs, grouped in front of the fire, at the tea-table with its tea-things glittering like shadows, at the big bunches of delicately coloured flowers in Chinese vases. Lightly she touched the sprays of guelder roses and toyed with their silver buds. Then she gazed gravely in the glass. Standing sideways and looking over her shoulder, she followed the outline of her fine figure in its sheath of black satin, over which floated a thin drapery, sown with beads and scintillating with lights of flame. Curious to examine that day's countenance, she approached the mirror. Tranquilly and approvingly it returned her glance as if the charming woman it was reflecting lived a life devoid of intense joy and profound sadness. On the walls of the great empty silent drawing-room, the tapestry figures at their ancient games, vague in the shadow, grew pale with dying grace. Like them, the terra cotta statuettes on pedestals, the groups of old Dresden china, the paintings on Sèvres, displayed in glass cases, spoke of things past. On a stand decorated with precious bronzes the marble bust of some royal princess, disguised as Diana, with irregular features and prominent breast, escaped from her

troubled drapery, whilst on the ceiling a Night, powdered like a marquise and surrounded by Cupids, scattered flowers. Everything was slumbering, and there was heard only the crackling of the fire and the slight rustling of beads on gauze.

Turning from the glass, she went to the window, raised one corner of the curtain, and looked out into the pale twilight, through the black trees on the quay to the yellow waters of the Seine. The grey weariness of sky and water was reflected in the greyness of her beautiful eyes. One of the "Swallow" boats passed, coming from under an arch of the Pont de l'Alma, and bearing humble passengers towards Grenelle and Billancourt. She looked after it as it drifted down the muddy current; then she let the curtain fall, and, sitting down in her accustomed corner of the sofa, under the flowers, she took up a book, laid upon the table just within hand's reach. On its straw-coloured linen cover glittered in gold the title: *Yseult la Blonde,* by Vivian Bell. It was a collection of French verse written by an Englishwoman and printed in London. She opened it by chance and read:

> Like to a worshipper who prays and sings,
> The bell on the quivering air "Hail Mary!" rings;
> And there in the orchard, 'mid the apple trees,
> The messenger the shuddering virgin sees,
> Awed, his red lily takes, whose perfum'd breath
> Makes her who breathes it half in love with death.
>
> In the wall'd garden, in the cool of the day,
> Through her cleft lips her soul would speed away,
> Her life, at some unconquerable behest,
> Even as a stream, pour from her ivory breast.*

* Quand la cloche, faisant comme qui chante et prie,
Dit dans le ciel ému: "Je vous salue, Marie,"
La vierge, en visitant les pommiers du verger,
Frissonne d'avoir vu venir le messager

Waiting for her visitors to arrive, she read, indifferent and absent-minded, thinking less of the poetry than of the poetess: that Miss Bell, her most delightful friend perhaps, but one whom she hardly ever saw. At each of their rare meetings, Miss Bell embraced her, pecked her on the cheek, called her darling, and then gushed into prattling talk. Ugly and yet attractive, slightly ridiculous and altogether exquisite, Miss Bell lived at Fiesole as æsthete and philosopher, while in England she was renowned as the favourite English poetess. Like Vernon Lee and Mary Robinson, she had fallen in love with Tuscan life and art; and, without staying to complete her *Tristan,* the first part of which had inspired Burne-Jones to paint dreams in water-colours, she was expressing Italian ideas in Provençal and French verse. She had sent her *Yseult la Blonde* to "darling," with a letter inviting her to spend a month at her house at Fiesole. She had written, "Come; you will see the most beautiful things in the world, and you will make them more beautiful."

And "darling" was saying to herself that she would not go, that she was detained in Paris. But she was not indifferent to the idea of seeing Miss Bell and Italy again. Turning over the pages of the book, she fell upon this line:

The self-same thing a kindly heart and love.*

Qui lui présente un lys rouge et tel qu'on désire
Mourir de son parfum sitôt qu'on le respire.

La vierge au pardin clos, dans la douceur du soir,
Sent l'âme lui monter, aux lèvres, et croit voir
Couler sa vie ainsi qu'un ruisseau qui s'épanche
En limpide filet de sa poitrine blanche.

* Amour et gentil cœur sont une même chose.

And she wondered ironically but kindly whether Miss Bell had ever loved, and if so what her love-story had been. The poetess had an admirer at Fiesole, Prince Albertinelli. He was very handsome, but he seemed too matter-of-fact and commonplace to please an æsthete for whom love would have something of the mysticism of an Annunciation.

"How do you do, Thérèse? I am done up."

It was Princess Seniavine, graceful in her furs, which were hardly distinguishable from her dark sallow complexion. She sat down brusquely, and in tones harsh yet caressing, at once birdlike and masculine, she said:

"This morning I walked right through the Bois with General Larivière. I met him in the Allée des Potins, and took him to the Pont d'Argenteuil, where he insisted on buying from a keeper and presenting to me a trained magpie, which goes through its drill with a little gun. I am tired out."

"Why ever did you take the General so far as the Pont d'Argenteuil?"

"Because he had gout in his big toe."

Thérèse shrugged her shoulders, smiling:

"You are wasting your malice; and you are blundering."

"And you, my dear, would have me economise my kindness and my malice with a view to a serious investment?"

She drank some Tokay.

Announced by the sound of loud breathing, General Larivière came in, treading heavily. He kissed the hands of both women. Then, with a determined, self-satisfied air, sat down between them, ogling and laughing in every wrinkle of his forehead.

"How is M. Martin-Bellème? Still busy?"

Thérèse thought that he was at the Chamber and making a speech there.

Princess Seniavine, who was eating caviar sandwiches, asked Madame Martin why she was not at Madame Meillan's yesterday. There was a play acted.

"A Scandinavian play. Was it a success?"

"Yes. And yet I don't know. I was in the little green drawing-room, under the Duke of Orleans's portrait. M. le Ménil came and rendered me one of those services one never forgets. He saved me from M. Garain."

The General, who was a regular *Who's Who,* storing in his big head all kinds of useful information, pricked up his ears at this name.

"Garain," he asked, "the minister who was a member of the Cabinet at the time of the Princes' exile?"

"The very same. He was extremely occupied with me. He was explaining his heart's longings and looking at me with a most alarming tenderness. And from time to time with a sigh he glanced at the Duke of Orleans's portrait. I said to him, Monsieur Garain, you are making a mistake. It is my sister-in-law who is Orleanist. I am not in the least. At that moment M. le Ménil arrived to take me to have some refreshment. He complimented me on my horses. He told me there were none finer that winter in the Bois. He talked of wolves and wolf cubs. It was most refreshing."

The General, who never liked young men, said that he had met Le Ménil in the Bois the evening before galloping at a break-neck pace.

He declared that it was only old horsemen who

maintained the good tradition, and that the men of fashion of the day were wrong in riding like jockeys.

"It is the same in fencing," he added. "Formerly——"

Princess Seniavine suddenly interrupted him:

"General, see how pretty Madame Martin is. She is always charming, but at this moment she is more so than ever. It is because she is bored. Nothing becomes her better than boredom. We have been wearying her ever since we came. Just look at her overcast brow, her wandering glance, her mournful mouth. She is a victim."

She jumped up, kissed Thérèse affectionately, and fled, leaving the General astonished.

Madame Martin-Bellème entreated him to pay no attention to such a madcap.

He was reassured and asked:

"And how are your poets, Madame?"

He found it difficult to pardon Madame Martin's liking for people who wrote and did not belong to his circle.

"Yes, your poets? What has become of that M. Choulette, who used to come and see you in a red comforter?"

"My poets are forgetting me; they are forsaking me. You can't depend on any one. Men, things—nothing is certain. Life is one long treachery. That poor Miss Bell is the only one who does not forget me. She has written from Florence and sent me her book."

"Miss Bell; isn't she that young person with frizzed yellow hair, who looks like a lap-dog?"

He made a mental calculation and concluded that by now she must be at least thirty.

A white-haired old lady, modestly dignified, and

a little keen-eyed, vivacious man entered one after the other: Madame Marmet and M. Paul Vence. Then very stiff, wearing an eye-glass, appeared M. Daniel Salomon, sovereign arbiter of taste. The General made off.

They talked of the novel of the week. Madame Marmet had dined with the author several times, a very charming young man. Paul Vence thought the book dull.

"Oh!" sighed Madame Martin, "all books are dull. But men are much duller than books; and they are more exacting."

Madame Marmet asserted that her husband, a man of fine literary taste, had felt an intense horror of fealism to the end of his days.

The widow of a member of the Academy of Inscriptions, sweet and modest in her black dress with her beautiful white hair, Madame Marmet prided herself in society on being the widow of an illustrious man.

Madame Martin told M. Daniel Salomon she would like to consult him about a porcelain group of children.

"It is Saint-Cloud. Tell me if you like it. You must give me your opinion too, Monsieur Vence, unless you scorn such trifles."

M. Daniel Salomon gazed at Paul Vence through his eye-glass with sullen haughtiness.

Paul Vence was looking round the drawing-room.

"You have some beautiful things, Madame. And that in itself would be little. But you have only beautiful things and those which become you."

She did not conceal her gratification at hearing him speak thus. She considered Paul Vence to be

the only thoroughly intelligent man among her visiting acquaintance. She had appreciated him before his books had made him famous. Ill-health, a gloomy temper, hard work kept him out of society. This bilious little man was not very agreeable. Nevertheless he attracted her. She thought very highly of his profound irony, his untamed pride, his talent matured in solitude; and she justly admired him as an excellent writer, the author of fine essays on art and manners.

The drawing-room filled gradually with a brilliant assembly. The big circle of arm-chairs now included Madame de Vresson, about whom terrible stories were told, but who, after twenty years of partially suppressed scandals, retained a youthful complexion and looked out on the world through child-like eyes; old Madame de Morlaine, vivacious, scatter-brained, giving utterance to her witty remarks in piercing shrieks, while she agitated her unwieldly figure, like a swimmer in a life-belt; Madame Raymond, the wife of an Academician; Madame Garain, the wife of an ex-Minister, three other ladies; and standing by the mantelpiece, warming himself at the fire, M. Berthier d'Eyzelles, editor of *Le Journal des Débats* and deputy, who was stroking his white whiskers and trying to show himself off, while Madame de Morlaine was screaming at him:

"Your article on bimetallism a treasure, a gem! The end especially, pure inspiration."

Standing at the end of the drawing-room, a few young clubmen were solemnly drawling their conversation.

"How is it he has managed to hunt with the Prince's hounds?"

"He did nothing. It was his wife."

They had their philosophy of life. One of them never believed in promises.

"There's a kind of person I can't stand: a man with his heart in his hand and on his lips. When you are standing for a club, he says: 'I promise to vote for you.' 'Yes, but what will your vote be?' 'Why, of course not a black-ball.' But at the election it turns out he has put in a black-ball. Life is full of dirty tricks when you come to think of it."

"Then don't think of it," said a third.

Daniel Salomon, who had joined them, was whispering scandalous gossip, with an air of decorum. And at each interesting disclosure concerning Madame Raymond, Madame Berthier d'Eyzelles, and the Princess Seniavine he added carelessly: "Every one knows it."

Then gradually the crowd of visitors melted away. There remained only Madame Marmet and Paul Vence. The latter went up to the Countess Martin and asked:

"When shall I bring Dechartre to see you?"

It was the second time he had asked her. She was not fond of new faces. Very carelessly she replied:

"Your sculptor? When you like. At the Champs de Mars I saw some medallions by him which were very good. But he produces little. He is an amateur, isn't he?"

"He is sensitive. He does not need to work for a livelihood. He caresses his statues with a lingering affection. But be assured, Madame, he knows and he feels; he would be a master if he did not live alone. I have known him since he was a child. He is thought to be malicious and irritable. He is really passionate and shy. His defect, a defect

which will always hinder him from attaining the highest point of his art, is a lack of simplicity of mind. He grows anxious, distracted, and spoils his finest impressions. In my opinion he is less suited for sculpture than for poetry or philosophy. He knows a great deal, and his well-stored mind would astonish you."

The benevolent Madame Marmet approved.

She pleased in society because she appeared as if society pleased her. She listened well and spoke little. Very kind-hearted, she made her kindness valued by not bestowing it at once. Whether it was that she really liked Madame Martin or that she made a point of showing discreet signs of preference in every house she visited, she was warming herself contentedly, like a grandmother, in a corner by the fire under that Louis XVI mantel-piece which was an effective background to the tolerant old lady's beauty. The only thing lacking was her lap-dog.

"How is Toby?" asked Madame Martin. "Monsieur Vence, do you know Toby? He has long silky hair and a lovely little black nose."

Madame Marmet was enjoying this praise of Toby when there entered a fair rosy-cheeked old man, with curly hair; short-legged and short-sighted, almost blind under his gold spectacles. He came in, knocking against the furniture, greeting empty arm-chairs and running into mirrors. Then he pushed his beaked nose in front of Madame Marmet, who looked at him indignantly. It was M. Schmoll, of the Academy of Inscriptions. His smile was an affected grimace. He recited madrigals in honour of Countess Martin in that hereditary unctuous tone in which his Jewish fathers had importuned their creditors, the peasants of Alsace, Poland, and the

Crimea. He drawled out his sentences. A member of the French Institute, this great philologist knew every language except French. His gallantry amused Madame Martin. As rusty and heavy as the pieces of old iron sold by second-hand dealers, its only adornment was a few dried flowers culled from the Greek Anthology. M. Schmoll was a lover of poets and of women; and he was intelligent.

Madame Marmet pretended not to know him, and went out without returning his greeting. When he had exhausted his madrigals, M. Schmoll became sad and discontented. He groaned frequently. He complained bitterly at the way he was treated; he was neither sufficiently decorated nor sufficiently provided with sinecures, nor were he and Madame Schmoll and their five daughters sufficiently well housed at the State's expense. There was a certain greatness in his lamentations. Something of the soul of Ezekiel and Jeremiah was in him.

Unfortunately looking along the level of the table with his gold spectacles, he perceived Vivian Bell's book.

"Ah! *Yseult la Blonde*," he cried bitterly: "that is the book you are reading, Madame. I should like you to know that Vivian Bell has robbed me of an inscription, and that worse still she has distorted it by putting it into verse. You will find it in the book, page 109:

"Weep not, lowered lids between,
What is not, never has been—"
"Stem not my tears, dear maid,
A shade may weep for a shade!"*

* "Ne pleure pas, toi que j'aimais:
Ce qui n'est plus ne fut jamais.
Laisse couler ma douleur sombre;
Une ombre peut pleurer une ombre."

"You hear, Madame: A shade may weep for a shade. Well! those words are literally translated from a funeral inscription which I was the first to publish and to criticise. Last year, when I was dining at your house, finding myself next to Miss Bell at table, I quoted that sentence, which greatly pleased her. At her request the very next day I translated the whole inscription into French and sent it to her. And now I find it dismembered and disfigured in this volume of verse, with the title: *On the Via Sacra!* The Sacred Way! I am that way."

And he repeated with grotesque bad temper:

"It is I who am that Sacred Way, Madame."

He was annoyed that the poet had not mentioned him in connection with the inscription. He would have liked to read his name at the head of the poem, in the lines, in the rhyme. He was always wanting to see his name everywhere. He was always looking for it in the newspapers with which his pockets were stuffed. But he was not vindictive. He bore Miss Bell no ill-will. He agreed with a good grace that she was a very distinguished woman and the most prominent English poet of the day.

When he had gone, Countess Martin very ingenuously asked M. Paul Vence if he knew why kind Madame Marmet, generally so benevolent, had greeted M. Schmoll with such angry silence. He was surprised that she did not know.

"I never know anything."

"But the quarrel between Joseph Schmoll and Louis Marmet, with which the Institute resounded for so long, is very famous. It was only ended by the death of Marmet whom his implacable colleague pursued even to Père-Lachaise.

"The day that poor Marmet was buried sleet was falling. We were frozen and wet to the skin. By the graveside, in the mist, in the wind and the mud, Schmoll, under his umbrella, read a discourse inspired by cruel jocularity and triumphing pity. Afterwards still in the mourning coach, he took it to the newspapers. When an indiscreet friend showed it to Madame Marmet, she fainted. Can it be possible, Madame, that you have never heard of this erudite and bitter quarrel?

"The Etruscan language was its cause. Marmet devoted his life to the study of Etruscan. He was nicknamed 'Marmet the Etruscan.' Neither he nor any one else knew a single word of that completely lost language. Schmoll used to be always saying to Marmet: 'You know that you don't know Etruscan, my dear brother; that's why you are so greatly honoured as a scholar and a wit.' Piqued by such ironical praise, Marmet determined to know something of Etruscan. He read his brother Academicians a paper on the use of inflexions in the ancient Tuscan idiom."

Madame Martin asked what an inflexion was.

"Oh! Madame, if I stop to explain we shall lose the thread of the story. Be content to know that in this paper poor Marmet quoted Latin texts and quoted them incorrectly. Now Schmoll is an accomplished Latin scholar, who, after Mommsen, knows more than any one about inscriptions.

"He reproached his young brother (Marmet was not quite fifty) with knowing too much Etruscan and not enough Latin. From that moment he never let Marmet alone. At each meeting he chaffed him with a mirthful ferocity, so much so that, in the end, Marmet, in spite of his usual good temper, grew

angry. Schmoll is not vindictive. It is a virtue of his race. He bears those whom he persecutes no ill-will. One day, going up the stairs of the Institute, accompanied by Renan and Oppert, he met Marmet and held out his hand to him. Marmet refused to take it and said: 'I do not know you.'

" 'Do you take me for a Latin inscription?' replied Schmoll. That saying hastened Marmet's death. You now understand why his widow, who piously venerates his memory, should be horrified by the sight of his enemy."

"And to think that I should have asked them to dine here together, and placed them side by side!"

"Madame, that was not immoral, but it was cruel."

"My dear sir, perhaps I shall shock you, but if it were absolutely necessary to choose, I would rather be guilty of an immoral act than of a cruel one."

A tall young man, thin and dark, wearing a long moustache, now entered and greeted Madame Martin in an easy but brusque manner.

"Monsieur Vence, I think you know M. Le Ménil."

In reality they had already met at Madame Martin's and more than once at the fencing-school, which Ménil attended assiduously. The day before they had met at Madame Meillan's.

"At Madame Meillan's it is always dull," said Paul Vence.

"And yet," said M. Le Ménil, "she receives Academicians. I do not exaggerate their importance, but, after all, they are the elect."

Madame Martin smiled.

"We know, Monsieur Le Ménil, that at Madame

Meillan's you were more occupied with women than with Academicians. You took Princess Seniavine to have some refreshments, and talked to her about wolves."

"About what? About wolves?"

"About wolves—she-wolves and wolf-cubs—and the bare woods of winter. We thought your topics rather too barbarous for so pretty a woman."

Paul Vence rose.

"So, if you will permit me, Madame, I will bring you my friend, Dechartre. He is very desirous to know you, and I trust you will like him. He has an active mind. He is full of ideas."

Madame Martin interrupted him.

"Oh, I don't ask for so much as that. People who are natural and who appear what they really are rarely bore me and sometimes amuse me."

When Paul Vence had gone, Le Ménil listened to the sound of his footsteps dying away down the hall and to the noise of the front door closing; then drawing nearer to Madame Martin:

"Shall we say three o'clock to-morrow, at home?"

"Do you still love me, then?"

He urged her to give him an answer while they were alone; she tantalisingly replied that it was late, that she expected no more visitors, and that her husband was likely to come in.

He entreated her to give him an answer. Then, without waiting for any further persuasion, she said:

"You really wish it? Then listen. To-morrow I shall be free the whole day. Expect me at three o'clock in the Rue Spontini. We will go for a walk afterwards."

He thanked her with a glance. Then, having

returned to his place opposite her on the other side of the fireplace, he inquired who this Dechartre was whom she was asking to come and see her.

"I am not asking him to come. Monsieur Vence has asked if he may bring him. He is a sculptor."

He complained of her always wanting to see new faces.

"A sculptor? Sculptors are frequently not gentlemen."

"Oh, but he is so little of a sculptor! Still, if you don't wish it, I will not receive him."

"I should be very annoyed if society were to monopolise any of the time you devote to me."

"My friend, you have no reason to complain of my giving too much time to society. Yesterday I did not even go to Madame Meillan's——"

"You are quite right in going there as seldom as possible: it is not a house for you to visit."

He explained. All the women one met there had a past which was known and talked about. Besides Madame Meillan was said to promote intrigues. He enforced his statement by one or two examples.

Meanwhile, with her hands on the arms of her chair, in a charming attitude of repose, her head inclined to one side, she was gazing at the dying fire. Her thoughts had fled: there remained no sign of them, either in her face which was rather sad or in her languid pose; she was more desirable than ever in this slumber of her soul. For some time she continued in that absolute immobility which enhanced her natural attractiveness by an artistic charm.

He asked of what she was thinking. Half escaping from the melancholy mesmerism of the embers, she said:

"To-morrow, if you are willing, we will go to the remote quarters of the town, to those curious neighbourhoods where you can observe the lives of poor people. I like streets that are old and poverty-stricken."

While promising to gratify her fancy, he did not conceal that he thought it absurd. These excursions on which she made him accompany her bored him sometimes; and he considered them dangerous; they might be seen.

"And since so far we have succeeded in avoiding being talked about . . ."

She shook her head.

"Do you think we have never been talked about? Whether people know or do not know, they talk. Everything is not known, but everything is said."

She returned to her dreaming. He thought her dissatisfied, vexed at something she would not confide to him. He leaned forward gazing into her fine dreamy eyes in which the firelight was reflected. But she reassured him:

"I don't know whether people talk about me. And what does it matter if they do? Nothing matters."

He left her. He was going to dine at the club, where his friend Caumont, who was passing through Paris, expected him. She followed him with a glance of tranquil sympathy. Then she returned to contemplate the embers.

There she beheld the days of her childhood, the château in which she used to pass long sad summers, the trim woods, the damp and gloomy park, the pond with its green stagnant water, the marble nymphs under the chest-nut trees, and the bench, on which she used to weep and long to die. Even to-day

she did not know the cause of her youthful despair, when the tumultuous awakening of her imagination and a mysterious physical evolution cast her into an agitation in which desires were mingled with fears. As a child, life had inspired her at once with fear and longing. And now she knew that life is not worth such anxiety and such hope, that it is a very ordinary matter. She ought to have expected it. Why had she not foreseen it? She continued her revery.

"I used to look at mama. She was a good woman, very simple-minded but not very happy. I dreamed of a lot very different from hers. Why? I felt that the atmosphere around me was enervating, and I longed for the stronger, salter air of the future. Why? What did I want, and what did I expect? Had I not warning enough of the sadness of everything?"

She was born rich and surrounded by the glaring brilliance of a newly made fortune. The daughter of that Montessuy, who, at first a mere clerk in a Parisian bank, had founded and directed two great banking houses, and by using all the resources of an inventive mind, invincible strength of character, a rare blend of cunning and honesty, had piloted them through a difficult crisis, and dealt with the Government on an equal footing. She had grown up in the historic château of Joinville, which, bought, restored, and magnificently furnished by her father, with its park and its extensive lakes, had come to equal Vaux-le-Vicomte in splendour. Montessuy enjoyed to the full all that life had to give. By instinct a pronounced atheist he was determined to have every material benefit and every desirable thing that earth produces. He crowded into the gallery and reception rooms of Joinville pictures by the

great masters and precious marbles. At fifty he was paying for the luxuries of the most beautiful actresses and a few women in society. With all the brutality of his temperament and the keenness of his intelligence he enjoyed social life.

Meanwhile poor Madame Montessuy was languishing at Joinville. Anxious and frugal, she appeared poor and diminutive by the side of the twelve gigantic caryatides which, around her bed enclosed by a gilded balustrade, supported the ceiling painted by Lebrun with Titans pursued by the thunderbolts of Jupiter. There one evening on a little iron bedstead, put up at the foot of the great state bed, she died of sorrow and weakness, her only loves having been her husband and her little red damask drawing-room in the Rue de Maubeuge.

There had never been any intimacy between mother and daughter. The mother felt instinctively that Thérèse had nothing in common with her. Her daughter's intellect was too capacious, her will too vigorous. Although she was good and docile, there flowed in her veins the strong blood of Montessuy. Thérèse had her father's ardour, of soul and body, an ardour from which the mother had suffered so bitterly and for which she found it easier to forgive the father than the daughter.

But Montessuy saw himself in his daughter and loved her. Like all *bon-vivants*, he had his times of charming gaiety. Although he was much away from home, he managed to lunch with her nearly every day, and sometimes he took her out. He was a connoisseur in dress and trinkets. As a glance he noticed and corrected in his daughter's toilet the mistakes made by Madame Montessuy's bad taste. He was educating and forming Thérèse. Coarse yet

entertaining, he amused her and won her affection. In his dealings even with her he was inspired by his instinct, his passion for conquest. He, who must always win, was winning his daughter. He was capturing her from her mother. Thérèse admired him, adored him.

In her revery, she saw him in the background of her past, as the one joy of her childhood. She was still fully persuaded that there was no more charming man than her father.

As soon as she entered society she despaired of finding elsewhere such natural qualities, such fulness of strength of body and of mind. This disappointment had persisted when she came to choose a husband, and later when she made a secret and a freer choice.

She had really not chosen her husband at all. She hardly knew how, but she had let herself be married by her father. He, being a widower embarrassed and troubled by the responsibility of a daughter in the midst of an agitated, busy life, had as usual wished to act quickly and well. He thought only of external distinctions and social conventions; he appreciated the advantage of the eighty years of imperial nobility offered by Count Martin, and the hereditary glory of a family which had provided with ministers the Government of July and the Liberal Empire. The idea of his daughter finding love in marriage never occurred to him.

He persuaded himself that in marriage she would find the satisfaction of that desire for splendour with which he had inspired her. He hoped that she would have the joy of being rich and appearing so, that she would gratify the vulgar pride, the desire for material superiority, which for him constituted

the essence of life. For the rest, he had no very definite ideas concerning the happiness of a respectable woman in society; but he was quite sure that his daughter would always be a respectable woman. That was an innate conviction; on that point his mind was perfectly at rest.

Reflecting on that confidence, foolish and yet natural, which was so contrary to Montessuy's own experiences and ideas of women, she smiled a smile of ironic melancholy. She admired her father all the more for being too wise to indulge in importunate wisdom.

After all, he had not married her so badly, according to the standards of marriage among the leisured classes. Her husband was as good as many another. He had become quite tolerable. Of all the memories, which, in the half-light of the shaded lamps, the embers recalled to her, that of their life in common was the least vivid. All that returned to her were the painfully distinct recollections of one or two incidents, some foolish imaginings, an impression vague and unpleasant. That time had not lasted long, and had left nothing behind it. Now after six years she hardly remembered how she had gained her liberty, so prompt and easy had been that victory over a husband, cold, valetudinarian, egotistical, and polite. Ambitious, industrious, and commonplace, he had grown sere and yellow in business and politics. It was only through vanity that he loved women, and he had never loved his wife. Their separation had been frank and complete. And since then, strangers one to the other, they were both grateful for their mutual deliverance. She would have regarded him as a friend, had she not found him cunning, sly, and too artful in obtaining her sig-

nature when he needed money. This money he employed in enterprises prompted less by cupidity than by a desire for ostentation. Except for this the man with whom she dined, lived, travelled, and talked every day was nothing to her and had no share in her life.

Absorbed in her own thoughts, sitting chin in hand, before the dead fire, like an anxious inquirer consulting a sibyl, as she reviewed those years of solitude, she beheld the face of the Marquis of Ré. It was so clear and distinct that she was astonished. Introduced by her father, who was proud of the acquaintance, the Marquis of Ré appeared tall and handsome, decked with the glories of thirty years' private and social triumphs. He had enjoyed a long series of successes. He had seduced three generations of women and imprinted on each mistress's heart an imperishable memory. His virile grace, his refined elegance and his gift of pleasing prolonged his youth far beyond the usual limits. The young Countess Martin had been especially distinguished by him. She had been flattered by the homage of such a connoisseur. Even now to recollect it still gave her pleasure. He had a wonderful gift in conversation. She had found him entertaining and had let him see it. Thenceforth, lighthearted hero that he was, he had determined to bring his gay life to an appropriate close, by possessing this young woman, whom he admired more than any one, and who obviously liked him. To entrap her he laid all a rake's most ingenious toils. But she escaped from them very easily.

Two years later she had become the mistress of Robert Le Ménil, who, with all the ardour of his youth and all the simplicity of his heart had resolved

to win her. "I gave myself to him because he loved me," she told herself. It was true. It was also true that an unconscious, powerful instinct had impelled her, and that she had obeyed secret forces of her nature. But these proceeded from her subconscious self; what she had consciously done was to accept his love, because she believed it to be informed by that sincerity she had always sought. She had yielded directly she found herself loved to the point of suffering. She had given herself quickly, simply. He thought she had given herself lightly. He was mistaken. The irreparable act had brought on a feeling of overwhelming dejection and shame at suddenly having something to hide. All the whisperings she had heard about women who had lovers were buzzing in her burning ears. But, proud and sensitive, and with perfect taste, she was careful to hide the cost of the gift she bestowed and to say nothing which might engage her lover to go further than his own feelings would carry him. He never suspected that moral suffering, which after all only lasted a few days and was succeeded by perfect tranquillity. After three years she approved of her conduct as having been innocent and natural. Having done no one any wrong, she had no regrets. She was content. This relationship was her greatest happiness. She loved, she was loved. True she had never experienced the rapture she had dreamed of. But is it ever experienced? She was the mistress of a good honourable bachelor, who was much liked by women and popular in society, where he was considered haughty and fastidious; and he loved her sincerely. The pleasure she gave him and the joy of being beautiful for him were the bonds which bound her to him. He rendered her life, not always raptur-

ously delightful, but tolerable and sometimes pleasant.

What she had not guessed in her solitude in spite of the warning of vague misgivings and unaccountable sadness, her own inner nature, her temperament, her true vocation, he had revealed to her. She learned to know herself by knowing him. And her self knowledge brought her some pleasant astonishment. Their sympathies were neither of the head nor of the heart. She had a simple definite liking for him, which did not wear out quickly. And at that very moment she took pleasure in the thought of meeting him on the morrow, in the little flat in the Rue Spontini which had been their rendezvous for three years. It was with rather a brusque movement of her head and a more violent shrug of the shoulders than one would have expected from so exquisite a lady, that, alone in the chimney-corner, by a dead fire, she said to herself: "Ah! what I want is to be in love."

II

IGHT had already fallen when they came out of the little *entresol* in the Rue Spontini. Robert le Ménil hailed a passing cab, and looking anxiously at the man and his horse, entered the carriage with Thérèse. Close side by side, they drove among the vague shadows relieved by sudden lights, through the phantom town; in their hearts there were only sweet impressions now vanishing as rapidly as the fleeting lights shining through the blurred carriage windows. Everything outside appeared to them confused and fleeting, and in their hearts there was a sweet calm. The cab stopped near the Pont Neuf, on the Quai des Augustins.

They got out. A dry cold invigorated the dull January day. Thérèse under her veil breathed with delight the gusts of wind, which, crossing the river, swept the dust, as bitter and white as salt, along the hard ground. It pleased her to walk freely among strange sights. She loved to gaze upon that landscape of stone enveloped in the dim light of the atmosphere, to walk briskly along the quay where the black gauze-like branches of the trees stood out against the horizon reddened by the smoke of the town. It delighted her, leaning over the parapet, to watch the narrow arm of the Seine bearing its tragic waters, and to drink in the sadness of the river

between its low banks, devoid of willows or beeches. Already the first stars were twinkling high up in the sky.

"It looks as if the wind would put them out," she said.

He remarked that they were scintillating brilliantly. He did not consider it a sign of rain, as the peasants believe. On the contrary, he had observed that nine times out of ten the scintillation of the stars announced fine weather.

Near the Petit Pont on their right (lit by smoky lamps) were booths where old iron was sold. She gazed eagerly among the dust and rust of the wares displayed. The instinct of the curiosity-monger had been aroused in her; she turned the street corner and ventured as far as a lean-to in which some dark coloured rags were hanging from the damp beams of the ceiling. Behind the dirty windows, by the light of a candle, were to be seen saucepans, porcelain vases, a clarionette, and a bridal wreath.

He could not understand the pleasure she took in looking at these things.

"You will be covered with vermin. What can interest you there?"

"Everything. I am thinking of that poor bride whose wreath lies under the glass shade. The wedding breakfast was at Porte Maillot. There was a *garde républicain* in the procession. There nearly always is in the wedding-parties one sees in the Bois, on Saturdays. Don't they appeal to you, my friend, all these poor miserable trifles which in their turn are sharing the greatness of the past?"

Among the odd chipped cups with flowered patterns, she discovered a little knife with an ivory handle carved to represent a long thin woman with

her hair dressed *à la Maintenon*. She bought it for a few pence. She was delighted because she possessed the fork to match. Le Ménil confessed that he did not understand curios. But his aunt de Lannoix was quite a connoisseur. She was the talk of all the dealers of Caen. She had restored and furnished her château in the old style. It had once been the country house of Jean le Ménil, councillor in the Rouen Parliament in 1779. This house, which existed before his time, was described in a document of 1690, as a hunting lodge. In a room on the ground floor, at the back of white cupboards, protected by wire net-work, had been found books collected by Jean le Ménil. His aunt de Lannoix, he said, had wanted to arrange them, but she had discovered among them such frivolous works, with such indecent engravings, that she had had to burn them.

"How stupid your aunt must be!" said Thérèse.

She had long been bored by stories about Madame de Lannoix. In the provinces her lover had a mother, sisters, aunts, a large family, whom she did not know and who irritated her. He used to talk of them admiringly, and it annoyed her. She grew impatient of his frequent visits to his family, from whom he returned, with a musty air, narrow ideas, and sentiments that wounded her. He on his side was naïvely astonished and hurt by this antipathy.

He was silent. The sight of a tavern with windows all aglow through the railings, suddenly reminded him of the poet Choulette, who was considered a drunkard. With some irritation he asked Thérèse if she still saw Choulette, who used to visit her wrapped in a plaid with a red comforter over his ears.

She was vexed at his speaking of the poet in the manner of General Larivière. She avoided confessing that she had not seen him since the autumn and that he neglected her with the indifference of a busy man who did not belong to her circle.

"I like him," she said. "He is witty, imaginative, and original."

And when he reproached her with a taste for the eccentric, she retorted sharply:

"I have not a taste; I have many tastes. Surely you don't condemn them all."

He did not condemn anything. He merely feared lest she should put herself in a false position by receiving a Bohemian of fifty who was out of place in any respectable house.

She objected:

"Choulette out of place in a respectable house? You don't know then that every year he spends a month at the Marchioness of Rieu's . . . yes, the Marchioness of Rieu, a Catholic, a Royalist, an old *chouane* as she calls herself. But since you are interested in Choulette, I will tell you of his latest adventure. You shall hear it just as Paul Vence told it me. I understand it better in this street, where there are bodices and flower-pots in the windows.

"This winter, one evening when it was raining, at a spirit-bar in a street, the name of which I have forgotten, but which must have been as poor as this one, Choulette met a wretched girl, whom the waiters at the bar had turned away, but whom he in his humility loved. She was called Maria. But even this name was not her own; she had found it on the door plate at the top of the staircase of a furnished house where she lodged. Choulette was

touched by the depth of her poverty and her shame. He called her his sister and kissed her hand. Since then he has never left her. He takes her bare-headed with a shawl over her shoulders to the cafés in the Latin quarter, where rich students are reading reviews. He says sweet things to her. He weeps; she weeps. They drink; and, when they have drunk, they fight. He loves her. He calls her very chaste. He says she is his cross, his salvation. She was bare-footed; he has given her a skein of coarse wool and knitting needles to knit herself some stockings. And he himself mends the poor girl's shoes with huge nails. He teaches her easy verses. He fears to spoil her moral beauty by taking her from the shame in which she lives in perfect simplicity and admirable destitution."

Le Ménil shrugged his shoulders.

"But this Choulette must be mad; and these are pretty stories that M. Paul Vence tells you! I am certainly not strict; but there is a kind of immorality which disgusts me."

They were paying no heed to where they were going. She became absorbed in her reflections:

"Yes, morality, duty, I know! But how hard to discover what is duty. I assure you that for three-quarters of my time I do not know where duty lies. It is like the hedgehog that belonged to our English governess at Joinville: we used to spend the whole evening looking for it under the furniture; and when we had found it it was time to go to bed."

He thought there was a great deal of truth in what she said, more perhaps than she imagined. He often reflected on it when he was alone.

"So keenly do I realise it that sometimes I regret not having remained in the army. I foresee what

you are going to say. One vegetates in that profession. Doubtless, but one knows exactly what one has to do, and that is much. It seems to me that the life led by my uncle, General de La Briche, is a fine life, honourable and quite pleasant. But now that the whole nation is merged in the army, there are neither officers nor soldiers. It is like a railway station on Sunday when officials are pushing bewildered travellers into their carriages. My uncle de La Briche knew personally all the officers and all the private soldiers of his brigade. He still has their names on a great board in his dining-room. From time to time it amuses him to read them over. Nowadays how would it be possible for an officer to know his men?"

She had stopped listening to him. She was looking at a corner of the Rue Galande, where there was a woman selling fried potatoes. Nestling behind a pane of glass, her face surrounded by shadow, lit up by the glowing fire, she was plunging her ladle into the frizzling fry, and bringing up golden crescents with which she filled a screw of common yellow paper. Meanwhile an auburn-haired girl, watching her attentively, was holding out a penny in her red hand. When the girl had carried off her packet, Thérèse grew envious and realised that she was hungry; she insisted on tasting some of the fried potatoes. At first he objected.

"You don't know what they are fried with."

But in the end he must needs ask the woman for a penny packet and see that she put some salt in it.

While she was eating the yellow crescents with her veil turned back, he took her into side streets, away from the gas lamps. Thus they found themselves back again on the quay, and saw the black

mass of the cathedral rising beyond the narrow arm of the river. The moon high up over the serrated ridge of the nave, shed a silver light over the slope of the roof.

"Notre Dame," she said! "Look, it is as heavy as an elephant and as finely made as an insect. The moon climbs up it, looking at it with the malice of an ape. She is not like the country moon at Joinville. At Joinville, I have my own path, a level path, with the moon at the end. She is not there every evening, but she returns faithfully, full, red, and familiar. She is a country neighbour, a lady of the district. Politely and with a friendly feeling I go gravely to meet her; but this Paris moon I should not wish to visit. She could hardly mix in good society. Think what she must have seen during all the time she has been shining on the roofs!"

He smiled a tender smile. "Ah! Your little path down which you used to walk alone and which you said you loved because the sky was at the end, not very high and not very far above you, I see it now as if I were there!"

It was at the château of Joinville, where he had been invited to hunt by Montessuy, that he had first seen her, and had immediately loved and desired her. It was there one evening, on the border of the little wood, that he had told her he loved her and that she had listened to him in silence, with a sad smile and wondering eyes.

The memory of that little path, where she used to walk alone on those autumn nights, touched and agitated him; it brought back the enchanted hours of early desires and fearful hopes. He sought her hand in her muff, and pressed her slight wrist under the fur.

A little girl with violets on a piece of flat basket-work, strewn with pine branches, saw they were lovers, and offered them her flowers. He bought a bunch for a penny and gave them to Thérèse.

She was walking towards the cathedral and thinking: "It is like some gigantic beast, a beast out of the Apocalypse."

At the other end of the bridge, another flower-seller, this one wrinkled, bearded, grey and grimy, pursued them with her basket of mimosa and Nice roses. Thérèse, who was at that moment holding her violets in her hand, trying to fasten them in her coat, replied gaily to the old woman's pleading:

"Thank you, I have all I want."

"It is easy to see you are young," the old woman said gruffly as she turned away.

Thérèse understood almost at once and half smiled. They passed into the shadow cast by the cathedral in front of the crowned and sceptred stone figures in the niches.

"Let us go in," she said.

He did not wish to. In entering a church with her he felt vaguely constrained, almost fearful. He said it was closed. He thought it was, and he hoped so. She pushed open the door and slipped into the immense nave, where the lifeless trees of columns rose into the darkness above. At the end candles were moving before phantom priests and the last groans of the organ were dying away in the distance. She shuddered in the silence, and said:

"The sadness of churches at night always moves me; it makes me feel the impressive mystery of annihilation."

He replied:

"But we ought to believe in something. It would

be too sad if there were no God, if our souls were not immortal."

For a time she remained still beneath the great curtains of shadow which hung from the vault, then she said:

"My poor friend, we don't know what to do with this short life, and do you want another which shall be eternal!"

In the carriage which took them home, he said gaily that he had enjoyed his day. He kissed her, pleased with her and with himself. But she did not share his good humour. That was what generally happened between them. The last moments they passed together were always spoilt for her by the foreboding that he would not say the right word when they parted. Usually he left her abruptly as if for him everything was over. At each of these separations she had a vague feeling that it was a final parting. She suffered in anticipation and became irritable.

Under the trees of the Cours-la-Reine, he took her hand and kissed it repeatedly.

"It is rare to love as we love, isn't it, Thérèse?"

"Rare, I don't know; but I believe that you love me."

"And you?"

"Yes, I love you."

"And you will always love me?"

"How can one know?"

And, seeing a cloud come over her lover's face:

"Would you be happier with a woman who would swear to love none but you all her life?"

He remained anxious and looked sad. She was considerate, and completely reassured him.

"You know, my friend, I am not a light woman. I am serious, not like Princess Seniavine."

Almost at the end of the Cours-la-Reine, they said good-bye under the trees. He kept the carriage to take him to the Rue Royale. He was dining at his club and going to the theatre. He had no time to lose.

Thérèse went home on foot. When she was in sight of the hill on which the Trocadéro stands glistening like a set of diamonds, she recalled the flower-seller on the Petit-Pont: "One can see that you are young"; those words, cast upon the wind and the darkness, came back to her no longer as a rude jest, but with an accent of sad foreboding. Yes, she was young, she was loved, and she was discontented.

III

IN the middle of the table was a centre-piece of flowers in a basket of gilded bronze. On the basket's edge, among stars and bees eagles spread their wings, beneath heavy handles formed by horns of plenty. On each side of the basket winged victories supported the flaming branches of the candelabra. This Empire epergne Napoleon had in 1812 presented to Count Martin de l'Aisne, grandfather of the present Count Martin-Bellème. Martin de l'Aisne, deputy in the Corps Legislatif of 1809, was nominated the following year member of the commission of finance, for which secret and laborious task his industrious, cautious nature was well fitted. Although liberal by birth and inclination, he pleased the Emperor by his diligence and honesty, exact but not importunate. For two years favours rained upon him. In 1813, he was a member of that moderate majority in favour of the report in which M. Lainé, when it was too late, taught the tottering Empire a lesson and censured at once power and misfortune. On January 1, 1814, he accompanied his colleagues to the Tuileries. They had a terrible reception. The Emperor met them with a volley of abuse. Violent and melancholy, in all the horror of his actual power and his imminent ruin, he overwhelmed them with wrath and scorn.

Walking up and down among his terrified

ministers, as if without thinking, he seized Count Martin by the shoulders, shook him and dragged him across the floor, crying: "A throne, what is a throne? Is it four pieces of wood covered with velvet? No! A throne is a man, and that man is I! You wanted to throw mud at me. Is this the moment to remonstrate with me when two hundred thousand Cossacks are crossing the frontiers? Your M. Lainé is a malicious person. One does not wash one's dirty linen in public." And while his wrath was thus finding expression in utterances sublime or commonplace, he was wringing in his hand the embroidered collar of the deputy for the department of Aisne. "The people know me. They do not know you. I am the chosen of the nation. You are the obscure delegates of a department." He prophesied that theirs would be the fate of the Girondins. Amidst the loud outbursts of his voice there sounded the clinking of his spurs. Count Martin trembled and stammered for the rest of his life. Hidden in his house at Laon, it was with trembling that he called in the Bourbons after the Emperor's defeat. It was in vain that two Restorations, the Government of July, and the Second Empire covered his palpitating breast with ribbons and crosses. Raised to the highest offices, loaded with honours by three kings and an emperor, he still felt the hand of the Corsican upon his shoulder. He died a Senator under Napoleon III., leaving a son afflicted with the hereditary trembling.

This son had married Mademoiselle Bellème, daughter of the First President of the Court of Bourges; and with her he had espoused the political glory of a family which had provided the limited monarchy with three ministers. The traditions of

the Bellèmes, who had been lawyers under Louis XV, corrected the Jacobin past of the Martins. The second Count Martin sat in every assembly until his death in 1881. Charles Martin-Bellème, his son, had no difficulty in getting elected to the Chamber. Having married Mademoiselle Thérèse Mountessuy, whose dowry provided him with the means of pushing his political fortunes, he discreetly took his place among those four or five titled and rich bourgeois, who, having rallied to the democracy and the Republic, were received with no ill grace by noted republicans, flattered by their aristocratic names and reassured by the mediocrity of their wits.

In the dining-room, where, above the doors, in the shadow, one now and then caught a glimpse of the spotted coats of the Oudry dogs, opposite the epergne with its gilded bees and stars, between the Victory candelabra, Count Martin-Bellème was doing the honours of his table with a somewhat dejected grace, a melancholy politeness, formerly indicated at the Elysée to represent for the benefit of a northern court the isolation and reserve of France. From time to time he was addressing insipid remarks on the right to Madame Garain, the wife of the former Keeper of the Seals, and on the left to Princess Seniavine, who, loaded with diamonds, was being bored to death. Opposite him, on the other side of the epergne, Countess Martin, supported on the one hand by General Larivière, and on the other by M. Schmoll of the Academy of Inscriptions, was languidly fanning her delicately moulded shoulders. On the two sides of the table were M. Montessuy, robust with blue eyes and a high colour, a young cousin, Madame Bellème de Saint-Nom, who did not know what to do with her long thin arms, the

painter Duvicquet, M. Daniel Salomon, Paul Vence, Deputy Garain, M. Bellème de Saint-Nom, an obscure Senator, and Dechartre, who was dining at the house for the first time. The conversation at first was thin and slight; but it gradually grew more vivacious, until it became one confused murmur, dominated by the voice of Garain.

"Every false idea is dangerous. Dreamers are thought to be harmless; it is a mistake; they do a great deal of harm. Utopias, apparently the most inoffensive are really injurious. They tend to make one disgusted with reality."

"But," said Paul Vence, "perhaps reality is not so perfect, after all."

The Keeper of the Seals protested that he was in favour of every possible reform. And, without recalling that under the Empire he had demanded the abolition of a standing army, and, in 1880, the separation of Church and State, he declared that, faithful to his program, he remained the devoted servant of the democracy. His motto, he said, was "Order and Progress." And he really believed that he was the first to use it.

Montessuy retorted with his rough good-nature:

"Come, Monsieur Garain, now be sincere, and confess that there is not a reform left to accomplish, and that the most one could do would be to change the colour of the postage-stamps. Good or bad, things are as they must be. Yes," he added, "they are as they must be. But they are always changing. Since 1870, the industrial and financial condition of the country has passed through four or five revolutions which economists had not foreseen and which they don't yet understand. In society, as in nature, changes proceed from within."

In politics he believed in views which were short and clear. Strongly attached to the present and caring little for the future, Socialists did not much trouble him. Without considering whether the sun and capital would endure for ever, he enjoyed them for the time being. In his opinion one must let oneself drift. Only idiots resisted the current, only madmen anticipated it.

But Count Martin, who was naturally melancholy, had gloomy presentiments. In veiled words he indicated the approach of catastrophe.

His ominous talk reached Monsieur Schmoll across the flowers of the centre-piece and moved him; he began to groan and prophesy. He explained that Christendom was of itself incapable of rising from barbarism, and that if it had not been for Jews and Arabs, Europe would be to-day what she was in the time of the Crusades, enveloped in ignorance, wretchedness, and cruelty.

"It is only in those historical manuals given to children in our schools to pervert their minds that the Middle Ages have passed away. In reality barbarians are always barbarians. Israel's mission is to instruct the nations. It was Israel, who in the Middle Ages, introduced into Europe the wisdom of Asia. Socialism alarms you. It is a Christian evil just like monasticism. And anarchy? Don't you see that it is the old Albigensian and Vaudois leprosy? The Jews, who educated and civilised Europe, can alone to-day save her from that mischievous propaganda which is preying upon her. But the Jews have failed to do their duty. They have become Christians among Christians. And God is punishing them. He is permitting them to be plundered and driven into exile. Everywhere

anti-semitism is making alarming progress. In Russia my co-religionists are being hunted like wild beasts. In France civil and military offices are closed against the Jews. They are no longer admitted into aristocratic circles. After having brilliantly passed his examinations, my young nephew, Isaac Coblentz, was forced to renounce a diplomatic career. When Madame Schmoll calls upon the wives of certain of my colleagues they ostentatiously open anti-semite periodicals under her very nose. And would you believe that the Minister of Education refused me the cross of the Legion of Honour for which I asked him? There's ingratitude! There's madness! Anti-semitism, you must understand, means death to European civilisation."

There was a naturalness in this little man which surpassed the highest art. Grotesque and terrible, his sincerity overwhelmed every one. Madame Martin, who found him entertaining, congratulated him on it.

"At least," she said, "you defend your fellow-believers; you, Monsieur Schmoll, are not like a beautiful Jewess I know, who, having read in a newspaper that she was in the habit of receiving the *élite* of Israelitish society, went about complaining that she had been insulted."

"I am sure, Madame, that you are unaware of the excellence of Jewish ethics and of their superiority to all other ethical systems. Do you know the parable of the Three Rings?"

This question was lost in the noise of the various dialogues, discussions on foreign politics, exhibitions of pictures, fashionable scandals, and academical speeches. The last novel was discussed as well as a

new play about to be acted. It was a comedy with an episode in which Napoleon figured.

The conversation centred round Napoleon. He had been frequently represented on the stage. He had been lately studied in works widely read, where he appears as an object of curiosity, a popular character, no longer the people's hero, the military demi-god of the fatherland, as in the days when Norvins and Béranger, Charlet and Raffet, invented his legend. Now he was regarded as a remarkable personage, a type entertaining in every one of its most intimate details, just the figure to please artists and to interest the idly curious.

Garain, who had built up his fortune on hatred of the Empire, sincerely believed this reaction in national taste to be nothing but an absurd infatuation. He did not consider it dangerous and was not alarmed by it. He was one of those in whom fear breaks out suddenly and violently. For the moment, his mind was at rest; for he did not talk of forbidding the representations of plays, nor of seizing books, nor of imprisoning authors, nor of suppressing anything. Calm and severe, he regarded Napoleon merely as Taine's condottiere who kicked Volney in the stomach.

Every one had his own definition of the true Napoleon. Count Martin, opposite the imperial epergne and the winged Victories, appropriately described Napoleon as organiser and administrator, ranking him high as President of the Council of State, where his words shed light on many points hitherto obscure.

Garain asserted that during those unjustly famous council meetings, Napoleon, saying that he wanted some snuff, would ask the councillors for their gold

boxes painted with miniatures and adorned with diamonds, which they never saw again. They ended by never bringing any but leather snuff-boxes to the Council. Mounier's son had told him the story himself.

What Montessuy admired in Napoleon was his orderly mind. He had a liking for efficiency, Montessuy said, a taste which has almost died out.

The painter Duvicquet, who had a painter's ideas, was puzzled. On the funeral mask brought from Saint-Helena he failed to find the features of that handsome powerful face reproduced in medals and busts. Any one might observe the discrepancy now that the bronze reproductions of the mask no longer stored away in attics were to be seen in all the dealer's shops, surrounded by eagles and sphinxes of gilded wood. And in his opinion since Napoleon's real force was not Napoleonic, Napoleon's real soul might well not be Napoleonic either. Perhaps it was the soul of a good bourgeois; some one had said so, and he was inclined to believe it. Besides, Duvicquet, who prided himself on having painted the century's portraits, knew that famous men are quite different from the popular estimate of them.

M. Daniel Salomon observed that the mask of which Duvicquet had spoken, the cast taken from the Emperor's countenance after death, and brought to Europe by Dr. Antommarchi, was first produced in bronze and exposed to public view under Louis-Philippe, in 1833, and had then occasioned surprise and incredulity. This Italian, a quack apothecary, a chatterer eager for fame, was suspected of having hoaxed the public. The followers of Dr. Gall, whose system was then in favour, doubted whether

the mask were genuine. They could not find that it had the protuberances which indicate genius, and the forehead, examined according to the master's theories, presented no extraordinary formation.

"Exactly," said Princess Seniavine; "all that is remarkable about Napoleon is his having kicked Volney in the stomach and stolen snuff-boxes set with diamonds. M. Garain has just told us so."

"And are we quite sure," said Madame Martin, "that he was really guilty of that kick?"

"After all, everything is dubious," retorted the Princess gaily. "Napoleon did nothing; he did not even kick Volney, and he had the head of an idiot."

General Larivière felt it incumbent upon him to fire his shot. And this was what he said:

"Napoleon's campaign of 1813 has given rise to much criticism."

The General's one idea was to please Garain. Nevertheless he made an effort and formulated a comprehensive opinion:

"Napoleon made mistakes; and in his position he ought not to have made any."

And, very red in the face, he stopped abruptly.

Madame Martin asked:

"And you, Monsieur Vence, what do you think of Napoleon?"

"Madame, these bloated soldiers are not to my taste; and frankly, conquerors always seem to me to be dangerous lunatics. Nevertheless, the Emperor interests me as he interests the public. He has character and vitality. No poem or novel of adventure is equal to the *Memorial,* written however in an absurd style. What I really think of

Napoleon, if you wish to know, is that, having been created for glory, he appears in all the brilliant simplicity of an epic hero. A hero must be human. Napoleon was human."

These remarks were greeted with loud exclamations. But Paul Vence continued:

"He was violent and frivolous, and thus profoundly human. By that I mean, like other people. He aspired to enjoy unlimited power, which is what the ordinary man esteems and desires. He himself was possessed by the illusions with which he inspired the people. They constituted his strength and his weakness, and were his chief adornment. He believed in glory. Concerning life and society he held about the same opinions as one of his grenadiers. He never lost that childish seriousness which takes a delight in sword-play and the beating of drums, and that kind of innocence which makes good soldiers. He had a sincere respect for force. He was a man among men, flesh of their flesh. He never had a single thought that did not express itself in action; and all his actions were grandiose and yet ordinary. Heroes are the product of this vulgar greatness. And Napoleon is the perfect hero. His brain never travelled more quickly than his hand, that beautiful little hand which ground the world. He never for a single moment cared about anything he could not realise."

"Then you do not consider him an intellectual genius," said Garain. "I agree with you."

"Certainly," resumed Paul Vence, "he had the genius necessary to cut a brilliant figure in the civil and military arena of the world. But he had no speculative genius. That genius is 'quite another pair of cuffs,' as Buffon used to say. We possess

the collection of his writings and his speeches. His style is vivacious and graphic. And in this mass of ideas there is not a hint of any philosophical curiosity, of any interest in the unknowable, of any preoccupation with the mystery of destiny. When, at Saint-Helena, he talks of God or the soul, he seems like a good little schoolboy of fourteen. His soul cast into the world found itself proportioned to the world and embraced everything. Not a particle of this soul was ever lost in the infinite. A poet, he knew no poetry but that of action. His great dream of life was earth-bound. In his terrible and pathetic puerility he believed that man may be great; and time and misfortune never robbed him of that illusion. His youth, or rather his sublime adolescence, endured to the end, because all the days of his life were powerless to form in him a conscious maturity. Such is the abnormal condition of all men of action. They live entirely for the moment, and their genius is concentrated on one single point. They are constantly renewed, but they do not grow. The hours of their lives are not bound one to another by a change of grave disinterested reflection. They do not develop; one condition merely succeeds another in a series of deeds. Thus they have no inner life. This absence of any inner life is particularly noticeable in Napoleon. Hence that lightness of heart which enabled him to bear easily the weight of his misfortunes and mistakes. His soul, ever new, was born again every morning. He possessed to the highest degree a capacity for self-amusement. The first time he saw the sun rise over his gloomy rock of Saint-Helena he leapt from bed, whistling the air of a song. His was the repose of a mind superior to fortune, and above all things the lightness of

a mind ever apt for renewal. He lived outside himself."

Garain, to whom such an ingenious turn of thought and speech appealed little, wished to bring the discussion to a conclusion.

"In a word," he said, "the man had something of the monster in him."

"Monsters do not exist," replied Paul Vence. "And men who are said to be monsters inspire horror. Napoleon was loved by a whole nation. His power lay in kindling love in men's hearts wherever he passed. It was his soldiers' joy to give up their lives for him."

Countess Martin would like Dechartre to have given his opinion. But he seemed afraid to speak.

Schmoll was still asking whether any one knew the parable of the Three Rings, the sublime inspiration of a Portuguese Jew.

Garain, while congratulating Paul Vence on his brilliant paradox, regretted that intellect should thus be brought into play at the expense of morals and justice.

"There is one incontrovertible principle," he said; "men must be judged according to their actions."

"And what about women?" asked Princess Seniavine brusquely; "do you judge them according to their actions? And how do you know what they do?"

The sound of voices was mingled with the clear, bell-like ring of the plate. The atmosphere of the room became heated and loaded with vapour. Drooping roses shed their leaves on the table-cloth. In the minds of those assembled there ideas multiplied:

General Larivière indulged in dreams of the future.

"When they have done for me," he said to his neighbour, "I will go and live at Tours, and grow flowers."

And he boasted of being a good gardener. A rose had been named after him. He was proud of it.

Schmoll was still asking if any one knew the parable of the Three Rings.

Meanwhile the Princess was teasing the deputy.

"Don't you know, Monsieur Garain, that people do identical things for very different reasons?"

Montessuy said she was quite right.

"It is true, Madame, as you say, that actions prove nothing. This idea strikes one in an episode in the life of Don Juan. Neither Molière nor Mozart was aware of it; but it is related in an English legend, told me by my friend, James Lovell, of London. It relates how the great seducer wasted his time with three women: one was a *bourgeoise* who loved her husband; another a nun who refused to violate her vows; the third, who had long lived a life of debauchery, having become ugly, was servant in a low lodging-house; after the life she had lived, and after what she had seen, love was nothing to her. The conduct of these three women was the same, but for very different reasons. One action proves nothing. It is the mass of actions, their weight, their sum, that constitutes the value of a human being."

"Certain of our actions," said Madame Martin, "resemble us; they are like us. Others do not resemble us at all."

She rose and took the General's arm.

As Garain was taking her into the drawing-room, the Princess said:

"Thérèse is right. . . . Some of our actions do not resemble us at all. They are little negresses conceived in our sleep."

The tapestry nymphs in their faded beauty smiled down on the guests who heedlessly passed them by.

Madame Martin poured out the coffee, assisted by her young cousin, Madame Bellème de Saint-Nom. She complimented Paul Vence on what he had said at dinner.

"You spoke of Napoleon with a freedom which is very rare among us. I have often noticed how pretty children when they are sulking resemble Napoleon on the evening of Waterloo. And you brought home to me the cause of that resemblance."

Then, turning to Dechartre:

"Do you like Napoleon?"

"Madame, I do not like the Revolution. And Napoleon is the Revolution in full military dress."

"Why didn't you say that at dinner, Monsieur Dechartre? But I see you refuse to display your wit except in *tête-à-tête.*"

Count Martin-Bellème took the men to the smoking-room. Paul Vence alone remained with the ladies. Princess Seniavine asked him if he had finished his novel and what it was about. It was a study, an attempt to arrive at truth by means of a logical sequence of appearances which become cumulative evidence.

"By such a method," he said, "the novel acquires a moral power which the dull details of history can never possess."

She asked if it would be a book for women to read. He replied that it would not.

"You make a mistake, Monsieur Vence, in not writing for women. It is the only thing that a superior man can do for them."

And when he wanted to know how she came by that idea:

"Because," she said, "I notice that intelligent women always marry fools."

"Who bore them."

"Certainly! But superior men would bore them still more."

"They would have greater chances of succeeding."

"But tell me the story of your novel."

"You insist."

"I never insist."

"Well! Here it is. It is a story of manners among the lower classes. The hero is a young artisan, serious and chaste, as beautiful as a girl, with a soul innocent and reserved. He is an engraver and does good work. In the evenings he studies at home with his mother, to whom he is devoted. He reads books. In his simple unfurnished mind ideas fix themselves as tightly as shots fired into a wall. He has few wants. He has neither the passions nor the vices which bind most of us to life. He is solitary and pure. Endowed with strong virtues, he becomes proud of them. He lives among miserable wretches. He sees them suffer. He is kind, although he is not human; he possesses that cold charity which is called altruism. He is not human because he is not sensual."

"Ah! Must we be sensual to be human?"

"Certainly, Madame. Whilst tenderness is but skin deep, pity lies far below the surface. This young man is not critical enough to grasp this. He is too credulous. He easily believes what he has read. And he has read that universal happiness will be established by the destruction of society. He is devoured by a thirst for martyrdom. One morning, having kissed his mother, he goes out. He lies in wait for the Socialist deputy for his district, sees him, throws himself upon him and plunges his graving-tool into his stomach, crying: 'Long live anarchy!' He is arrested, measured, photographed, examined, tried, condemned to death and guillotined. That is my novel."

"It will not be very amusing," said the Princess. "But that is not your fault; your anarchists are as timid and moderate as other Frenchmen. When Russians go in for anarchy they are more audacious and original."

Countess Martin came up to Paul Vence and asked him if he knew that very mild gentleman who said nothing and looked about him in the bewildered maner of a lost dog. Her husband had invited him. She did not know him, nor his name, nor anything about him. All that Paul Vence knew was that he was a Senator. He had noticed him one day in the Luxembourg, in the gallery which is used as a library.

"I had just been to see the cupola painted by Delacroix with heroes and sages of antiquity in a wood of blue-green myrtles. He was warming himself with a poor and pitiful air; and his clothes smelt musty. He was talking to some old colleagues and saying as he rubbed his hands: 'In my opinion, what proves that the Republic is the best

of governments, is that in 1871, in one week, it shot down sixty thousand rebels, without rendering itself unpopular. Such violence would have ruined any other government."

"Then," said Madame Martin, "he is quite a malicious person, while I was pitying him for his shyness and awkwardness."

Madame Garain, her chin resting softly on her breast, was slumbering peacefully; and her domestic soul was dreaming of her kitchen garden by the Loire, where choral societies were in the habit of coming to pay their respects to her.

Joseph Schmoll and General Larivière came out of the smoking-room, still smiling over the indecorous topics they had been discussing. The General sat down between Princess Seniavine and Madame Martin.

"This morning I met the Baroness Warburg in the Bois. She was riding a superb animal. She said to me: 'General, how do you manage always to have such fine horses?' I replied: 'Madame, in order to have fine horses, one must be either very rich or very shrewd.' "

He was so pleased with this retort that he repeated it twice, winking the while.

Paul Vence came up to Countess Martin:

"I know the Senator's name: it is Loyer; he is Vice-President of a group and author of a propagandist book, entitled 'The Crime of December the Second.' "

The General continued:

"It was a terrible day. I went into the shelter. There I met Le Ménil. I was in a bad temper. I saw that he was laughing at me in his sleeve. He

thinks that because I am a general I ought to like wind, hail, and sleet. But it is absurd. He said he did not mind bad weather, that next week he was going to stay with friends for the hunting."

There was a silence. The General resumed:

"I trust he may enjoy himself; but I don't envy him. Foxhunting is not amusing."

"But it is useful," said Montessuy.

The General shrugged his shoulders:

"A fox never molests the hen-house except in the spring, when he is feeding his young."

"A fox," replied Montessuy, "prefers the rabbit-warren to the poultry-yard. He is a stealthy poacher who injures the farmer less than the sportsman. I know something about that."

Thérèse seemed absent-minded; she was not listening to the Princess who was addressing her.

"He never even told me that he was going away," she pondered.

"Of what are you thinking, my dear?" asked the Princess.

"Of nothing at all interesting."

IV

HE little room was dark and silent. Curtains, portières, cushions, bear-skins, oriental rugs, hushed every sound. Swords, reflecting the fire-light, glistened on the cretonne of the walls, among targets and the faded relics of three winters' cotillions. On the rosewood chiffonier stood a silver cup, a prize awarded by some sporting society. On the painted porcelain top of the little table, a horn-shaped glass vase, over which ran a gilded convolvulus, was filled with branches of white lilac.

And the shadows were everywhere broken by glinting lights. Thérèse and Robert, their eyes accustomed to the darkness, moved freely amidst these familiar surroundings. He lit a cigarette, while she did her hair, standing, with her back to the fire, before the long glass, in which she was hardly able to see herself. But she would have neither lamp nor candles. For three years she had been in the habit of taking her hairpins from the little cup of Bohemian glass, which stood on the table, just within hand reach. He watched her threading her light fingers through her hair which fell in streams of yellow gold. Meanwhile her face, hardened and bronzed in the shadow, assumed a mysterious, almost an alarming expression. She did not speak.

He said to her: "You are no longer vexed, my love?"

And when he urged her to reply, to say something:

"What would you have me say, dear? I can only repeat what I told you on my arrival. I think it strange that I should be informed of your projects by General Larivière."

He knew well that she still bore him ill-will, that she had been reserved and stiff, with none of that self-surrender that generally made her so delightful. But he pretended to believe that her fit of the sulks was nearly over.

"My dear, I have already explained. I told you and I repeat that when I met Larivière, I had just received a letter from Caumont, reminding me of my promise to hunt in his woods, and I had replied by return of post. I was intending to tell you to-day. I regret that General Larivière anticipated me; but it really is not important."

With her arms raised handle-like above her head, she turned towards him with a tranquil gaze, that he did not understand.

"So you are going?"

"Next week, Tuesday or Wednesday. I shall be away ten days at the most."

She was putting on her sealskin toque in which was stuck a branch of mistletoe.

"It is a matter that admits of no delay?"

"Oh! no; the fox's fur will be worth nothing in a month's time. Besides Caumont has invited some of our common friends whom my absence would disappoint."

Sticking a long pin into her toque, she knit her eye-brows.

"Is your hunting very interesting?"

"Yes, very, because a fox plays all kinds of tricks which you have to thwart. The intelligence of the beast is wonderful. I have watched foxes hunting rabbits at night. They had organised everything and had regular beaters. I assure you it is not easy to dislodge a fox from his den. These hunting-parties are very gay. Caumont's wine is excellent. That doesn't appeal to me, but it is generally appreciated. Would you believe it, one of his farmers told him that he had learnt from a sorcerer how to tame a fox with magic words? I shan't adopt that method, but I promise to bring you back a dozen fine skins."

"What would you have me do with them?"

"They make very nice rugs."

"Ah! . . . And you will be hunting for a week?"

"Not quite. As I shall be near Sémanville, I shall spend two days with my Aunt de Lannoix. She is expecting me. Last year at this time she had made up a delightful party. There were her two daughters and her three nieces with their husbands; they are all five pretty, gay, charming, and irreproachable. At the beginning of next month I shall doubtless find them all assembled for my Aunt's birthday; and I shall stay two days at Sémanville."

"Stay as long as ever you like, dear. I should be extremely sorry if you were to cut short such a delightful visit on my account."

"But you, Thérèse, what will you do?"

"I? Oh! I shall be all right."

The fire was dying down. The shadows thickened. In a dreamy tone with a note of expectation she said:

"It is true that it is never very wise to leave a woman alone."

He came near her, trying to look at her in the darkness. He took her hand.

"You love me?"

"I assure you I do not love another. But——"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. I am thinking . . . I am thinking that, as we are parted the whole summer, and as, in the winter, you pass half your time with your family and your friends, if we are to meet so seldom it is hardly worth while our meeting at all."

He lit the candles. In the light her face appeared hard and frank. He looked at her with a confidence proceeding less from that self-conceit common to all lovers than from his reliance upon a certain conventional propriety. A strong prejudice acquired in his youth and the simplicity of his intelligence caused him to believe in her.

"Thérèse, I love you and you love me, I know it. Why will you torment me? Sometimes your hardness and reserve are very painful."

She tossed her little head brusquely.

"I can't help it. I am bitter and self-willed. It is in my blood. I inherit it from my father. You know Joinville; you have seen its château, its ceilings by Lebrun, its tapestry made at Maincy for Fouquet; you have seen its gardens designed by Le Nôtre, its park and its game; you said there were none finer in France; but you did not see my father's workshop, with its deal table and mahogany desk. All the rest originated there, my friend. On that table, standing at that desk, my father worked at figures for forty years, first in a little room in the Place de la Bastille, then in the flat in the Rue

Maubeuge, where I was born. We were not very rich then. I have seen the little red damask drawing-room, with which my father set up housekeeping, and which mama loved so much. I am a child of a self-made man or of a conqueror, for it comes to the same thing. We are people who have had to make our way. My father was determined to make money, to possess what pays, that is everything. I am determined to win and to keep. What? I don't know . . . whether it be the happiness I possess . . . or one that I have not. In my own way I also am greedy, greedy of dreams, of illusions. Oh! I know well that they are not worth the effort one makes to enjoy them, but it is the effort itself that is worth something, because that effort is I, is my life. I am bent upon enjoying what I love, what I thought I loved. I am determined not to lose it. I am like papa: I stand upon my rights. And then . . ."

She lowered her voice.

"And then I too have senses. There, my dear, I am boring you. I can't help it. I ought never to have surrendered to you."

This petulance, to which he was accustomed, marred his pleasure. But it did not alarm him. Extremely sensitive to her acts, he did not care what she said, and attached little importance to words, especially a woman's. Himself a taciturn person, he was far from imagining that words may also be actions.

Although he loved her, or rather because he loved her ardently and trustfully, he thought it his duty to oppose whims that he considered absurd. When he did not vex her she was pleased for him to

assume a masterful air; and, naïvely, he always assumed it.

"You know, Thérèse, that my one thought is to please you in everything. Don't be capricious."

"And why should I not be capricious? If I gave myself to you, it was an act neither rational nor dutiful; it was a caprice."

He looked at her surprised and saddened.

"The word wounds you, dear? Say that it was love. And really the impulse did come from my heart; it was because I knew you loved me. But love should be a pleasure; and if I do not find that it satisfies what you call my caprices, what really is my desire, my life, my very heart, I will have no more of it; I prefer to live alone. You astonish me. My caprices! Is there anything else in life? Is not your hunting a caprice?"

He replied very frankly:

"If I had not promised, I swear that I would gladly sacrifice this little pleasure for your sake."

She knew that what he said was true. She knew how exact he was in keeping his word in the most trifling matters. Always true to his promises, he was minutely and conscientiously scrupulous in the performance of all his social duties. She saw that if she insisted he would not go. But it was too late: she no longer wished to gain that point. Now all that she sought was the bitter joy of losing it. A reason she really considered absurd she now pretended to take seriously.

"Ah! you promised."

And she affected to yield.

Surprised at first, he was soon secretly congratulating himself on having brought her to reason. He

was grateful to her for not having persisted in her obstinacy. He put his arm round her, and, as a reward, in a frank, friendly manner, kissed her on the eyelids and the nape of her neck. He showed himself eager to devote to her the rest of his days in Paris.

"We can meet three or four times before my departure, my darling, and oftener still, if you like. I will be here ready for you whenever you wish to come. Shall it be to-morrow?"

She took a delight in saying that she could return neither to-morrow nor the following days. Very sweetly she explained what would prevent her from coming. The obstacles appeared trivial at first: calls to be paid, a frock to be fitted, a bazaar, exhibitions, hangings she wanted to see and perhaps buy. But on examination these difficulties grew more important, more numerous: the calls could not be postponed; it was not one bazaar but three she had to attend; the exhibitions were on the eve of closing; the hangings were going to America. In short, it was quite impossible for her to see him again before he started.

As it was not like him to be content with such trivial reasons, he perceived that neither was it like Thérèse to give them. Bewildered by this tangle of trifling social obligations, he did not resist, but remained silent and unhappy.

With her left arm raised above her head, she lifted the portière, and with her right hand turned the key in the lock. And there in the sapphire and ruby coloured folds of the oriental curtain, her head turned towards the lover she was leaving, she said in tones half mocking but almost tragic:

"Good-bye, Robert! Enjoy yourself. My calls, my shopping, your visits are mere trifles; but it is

true that destiny depends on such trifles. Good-bye."

She went out. He would have liked to go with her; but he deemed it unwise to be seen in the street with her, when she did not insist upon it.

Outside Thérèse suddenly felt alone, alone in the world, without joy and without sorrow. As usual she returned home on foot. It was dark, the night was cold, clear, and calm. But the streets she followed in the darkness, broken here and there by lights, enveloped her in that tepid warmth of towns which penetrates even through the winter's cold and is so grateful to town-dwellers. She was passing between lines of sheds, cottages, and booths, remnants of the rural days of Auteuil, with here and there a high-storied house, displaying its coping stone in dismal isolation. These little shops and monotonous windows were nothing to her. Nevertheless, in some mysterious manner her surroundings seemed friendly; and the stones of the street, the doors of the houses, the lights high up in the windows appeared to her not unkind. She was alone, and she wished to be alone.

The road she was traversing between those two dwellings, which were almost equally home-like to her, that road she had travelled so often, it now seemed as if she were passing over for the last time. Why? What had the day brought her? Hardly a vexation, not even a quarrel. Nevertheless, there hovered over its past hours a faint, curious, yet persistent suggestion, a strange memory that would cling to that day for ever. What had happened? Nothing. And that nothing effaced all. She had a kind of sub-conscious conviction that she would never again enter that room, which once contained

all that was dearest and most secret in her life. Hers was a serious relationship. She had given herself gravely to realise a joy that was necessary to her. Made for love, and very rational, she had not lost, in the abandonment of her person, that instinct for reflection, that aspiration after serenity which were very strong in her. She had not chosen; one hardly ever does. Neither had she allowed herself to be taken by chance or by surprise. She had done what she had wished to do as much as one ever does in such matters. She had nothing to regret. He had behaved irreproachably towards her. She must in justice admit it with regard to a man much sought after in society and having all the women at his feet. Nevertheless, in spite of everything, she felt that it was over and that its conclusion was quite natural. She was thinking with dull melancholy: "Three years of my life, a good man who loves me and whom I loved, for I did love him. Otherwise I could not have given myself to him. I am not an unscrupulous woman." But she could no longer revert to the sentiments of those days, the impulses of her soul and of her body. She recalled trivial quite insignificant details: the flowers on the wall paper, the pictures in the room; it was a room in a hotel. She remembered the words somewhat ridiculous and yet almost touching that he had said to her. But it seemed as if these experiences were those of another woman, some stranger whom she did not much like and hardly understood.

And what had just happened, those caresses she had so recently received, all that was far away. The couch, the lilac in its glass vase, the little cup of Bohemian glass where she kept her pins—she saw it

all as if gazing into the room from the street. She knew no bitterness, not even sadness. She had nothing to pardon, alas! That week's absence was no infidelity, no wrong done her; it was nothing, that was all. It was the end. She knew it. She wished it to be the end. She willed it just as the falling stone wills to fall. She was obeying all the secret forces of her being. She was saying to herself: "There is no reason why I should love him less. Do I no longer love him? Have I ever loved him?" She did not know, and she did not care to know.

Three years during which their rendezvous had been twice, occasionally four times a week. There had been months when they had met every day. Was that nothing? But life is no great matter. And how little one puts into it!

After all she had no cause to complain. But it was better to make an end of it. All her reflections brought her back to that. It was not a resolution. Resolutions may be changed. This was graver; it was a mental and a physical condition.

Having reached the square, with a fountain in the middle and on one side a Gothic church with its bell enclosed in a turret open to the sky, she remembered the penny bunch of violets he had given her one evening on the Petit-Pont, near Notre Dame. That day they had loved each other more passionately than usual. Her heart softened as she remembered it. She felt in her coat, but found nothing. In her memory alone lived the little nosegay, that poor little skeleton of flowers.

While she was walking dreamily, passers-by followed her, misled by the simplicity of her dress. One invited her to a restaurant, to dine in a private room and then go to a theatre. Far from being

embarrassed by these proposals, she was entertained by them. Her nerves were not in the least unstrung by the crisis she had passed through. "What do other women do?" she was wondering. "And I who congratulated myself on not wasting my life. What is life worth after all?"

When she came within sight of the Neo-Greek lantern tower of the Museum of Religions, she found the road up. Over a deep ditch, between banks of black earth, heaps of cobbles and piles of paving stones, a narrow bending plank had been thrown. She had already begun to cross it when before her she saw a man who had stopped to let her pass. He had recognised her and was taking off his hat. It was Dechartre. As she advanced she thought he was pleased at meeting her, and she thanked him with a smile. He asked if he might walk a little way with her. And together they entered the broad square, where the air was keener, where the tall houses were farther apart and the sky could be seen.

He said he had recognised her in the distance by the outline of her figure and the rhythmic movement of her walk.

"Graceful motion," he said, "is to the eyes what music is to the ears."

She replied that she loved walking, that it pleased and invigorated her.

He also liked to take long walks in populous towns or in the beautiful country. The mystery of the road tempted him. He loved travel; and even now, when it had become common and easy, it still attracted him. He had seen golden days and transparent nights in Greece, Egypt, and the Bosphorus.

But it was always to Italy he returned as to the home of his soul.

"I am going there next week," he said. "I want to see Ravenna again, asleep among the dark pine trees of that barren coast. Have you ever been to Ravenna? It is an enchanting tomb out of which rise dazzling phantoms.

"There is the magic of death. The mosaics of Saint Vitalis and of the two Saints Apollinaris, with their barbaric angels and their empresses with halos recall the delightful monsters of the East. The tomb of Galla Placidia, now that it has been robbed of its silver plates, looks terrible in its crypt, dark yet luminous. Looking through a crack in the sarcophagus it seems as if one saw the daughter of Theodosius seated on her golden chair, very straight in her bejewelled gown embroidered with scenes from the Old Testament, her handsome cruel face hardened and blackened by the aromatic spices used for embalmment, and her ebony hands motionless upon her knees. For thirteen centuries she remained in funereal majesty, until a child, passing with a candle near the opening in the tomb, burnt the body and the dalmatic."

Madame Martin-Bellème asked what had been the life of this corpse so inflexible in her pride.

"Twice a slave," said Dechartre, "she became twice an empress."

"She was beautiful doubtless," said Madame Martin. "Your description of her in her tomb is so vivid that she alarms me. Will you not go to Venice, Monsieur Dechartre? Or are you tired of gondolas, of canals fringed with palaces, and of the pigeons of Saint Mark? I confess that after having visited Venice three times I still love her."

He agreed with her. He too loved Venice. Whenever he went there he was converted from a sculptor into a painter, and he was always sketching. But it was the atmosphere that he would like to paint.

"Elsewhere," he said, "even at Florence, the sky is distant, high up, far away in the background. At Venice it is everywhere: it caresses earth and water; it lovingly envelops leaden domes and marble façades and casts its pearls and its crystals into purple space. The beauty of Venice consists in its sky and its women. How beautiful are Venetian women and of so clear and pure a cast. How slender and supple a figure beneath the black shawl. Were nothing left of these women but a single bone, that bone would suggest the charm of their exquisite form. On Sunday, at church, they gather in groups, laughing and vivacious, a medley of slim figures, graceful necks, tender smiles, and ardent glances. And, with the suppleness of a young doe, the whole group bows when a priest with the head of a Vitellius, his chin hanging over his chasuble, passes bearing the ciborium, preceded by two choristers."

He walked with unequal step impelled by the flow of his ideas. Her pace was more regular and slightly more rapid than his. And, looking at her from the side, he saw the measured step and supple gait that he loved. He noticed how the determined motion of her head every now and then made the sprig of mistletoe in her toque quiver.

Without realising it he was experiencing the charm of an association almost intimate with a young woman whom he scarcely knew.

They had reached the place where the broad

avenue displays its four rows of plane trees. They were following that stone parapet crowned by a box hedge, which happily conceals the ugliness of the military buildings on the lower side of the quay. Beyond, the river was indicated by that thickness of the atmosphere which even on days when there is no mist is to be found over the surface of water. The sky was clear. The lights of the town mingled with the stars. In the south shone the three golden nails of Orion's Belt.

"Last year at Venice, every morning as I went out, I used to see a charming girl, with a small head, a round and solid neck, and well-developed figure in front of my door, three steps above the canal. There she was in the sunshine, amidst vermin, as pure as an amphora, as captivating as a flower. She smiled. What a mouth! The richest jewel in the finest light. I perceived in time that this smile was intended for a butcher boy, encamped behind me, with his basket on his head."

At the corner of the short street which leads down to the quay, between two rows of little gardens, Madame Martin slackened her pace.

"It is true that Venetian women are beautiful."

"They are nearly all beautiful, Madame. I speak of the women of the people, cigarette makers, glass-workers. The others are the same everywhere."

"By the others, you mean society women; and those you do not love?"

"Society women? Oh! some are charming. But as for loving them, that is a serious matter."

"Do you think so?"

She gave him her hand and abruptly vanished round the corner of the street.

V

THAT evening she was dining alone with her husband. There were no winged victories or basket with gilded eagles on the table now reduced in size. The dogs of Oudry were no longer illuminated by hanging lights above the doors. While he was talking of everyday matters, she was in revery far away. It seemed to her that she was lost in a fog and remote from all things. It was a placid, almost a pleasant kind of suffering. Dimly as if through a mist she beheld the little room in the Rue Spontini carried by black angels on to one of the heights of the Himalayas. And, in an earthquake which seemed like the end of the world, her lover disappeared quite calmly while putting on his gloves. She felt her pulse to see if she was suffering from fever. Suddenly the clear tinkling of silver on the dinner-wagon roused her. She heard her husband saying:

"My dear, in the Chamber to-day Gavaut made an excellent speech on the pension fund. It is extraordinary how lucid his ideas have become, and how he now always seizes the point. He has made great progress."

She could not help smiling:

"But, my dear, Gavaut is a poor creature who has never thought of anything beyond rising from the crowd and making his own way. His ideas are

all on the surface. Can it be that he is really taken seriously in the political world? Believe me, he has never imposed upon a woman, not even on his own wife. And yet that kind of illusion can so easily be created, I assure you."

Then she added abruptly:

"You know that Miss Bell has invited me to spend a month with her at Fiesole. I have accepted, I am going."

Less surprised than displeased, he asked with whom she was going.

She had the answer ready immediately and replied:

"With Madame Marmet."

There was nothing to be said. Madame Marmet was a very respectable companion, especially suitable for Italy; for her husband, Marmet the Etruscan, had explored Italian tombs. He merely asked:

"Have you told her? And when do you start?"

"Next week."

He was prudent enough to offer no objection for the moment, thinking that opposition would only intensify what he considered a whimsical caprice. He remarked suavely:

"Travel is certainly very pleasant. I have been thinking that in the spring we might visit the Caucasus and the country beyond the Caspian. That is a region interesting and little known. General Annenkoff would place carriages and whole trains at our disposal on the railway he has constructed. He is a friend of mine and he admires you. He would provide us with an escort of Cossacks. Such an expedition would create an impression."

He insisted on appealing to her vanity, for he found it impossible to imagine that she was anything

but worldly minded, and, like himself, actuated entirely by self-love. She replied indifferently that it might be a pleasant trip. Then he praised the mountains, the ancient cities, the bazaars, the costumes, the weapons of the Caucasus. He added:

"We will take a few friends, Princess Seniavine, General Larivière, perhaps Vence or Le Ménil."

She replied with a dry little laugh that it was rather soon to decide whom they would invite.

He became attentive and kind.

"You are not eating. You are losing your appetite."

Although he did not believe in this sudden departure, the thought of it disturbed him. They had both resumed their liberty; but he did not like to be alone. He only felt himself when his wife was at home and his household was complete. Besides, he had decided to give two or three big political dinners during the session. His party was coming to the front. Now was the moment to strengthen his own influence and to shine before the public. He said mysteriously:

"There may come a crisis in which we shall need the support of all our friends. You have not been following the course of public events, Thérèse?"

"No, my dear."

"I am sorry. You have sense and an open mind. If you had taken an interest in politics you would have observed the growth of moderate opinions. The country is tired of extremes. It will not have men compromised by a Radical policy and religious persecution.

"A day will come when we shall have to form another Casimir-Périer ministry, but with new men, and then——"

He paused. She was barely listening.

Sad and disillusioned, she was lost in revery. It seemed to her that the pretty woman who, not long ago, in the warmth and shadow of a darkened room, was standing barefoot on a brown bearskin rug, while her lover kissed her neck, as she twisted her hair before the glass, was not herself, was not even a woman whom she knew well or wished to know, but a lady whose affairs did not interest her. A hairpin, one of those out of the Bohemian glass cup, fell from her hair down her neck. She shuddered.

"But we must give three **or** four dinners to our political friends," said M. Martin-Bellème. "We will invite former Radicals as well as members of our own circle. We ought to have some pretty women too. We might quite well invite Madame Bérard de la Malle: it must now be two years since anything was said against her. What do you think?"

"But, my dear, I am going next week."

He was alarmed.

Together, both silent and gloomy, they went into the little drawing-room, where Paul Vence was waiting. He often came unceremoniously in the evening.

She shook hands.

"I am very glad to see you. I must bid you farewell for a short time. Paris is cold and dull. This weather makes me tired and sad. I am going to spend six weeks at Florence with Miss Bell."

M. Martin-Bellème raised his eyebrows.

Vence asked whether she had not already been to Italy several times.

"Three times. But I saw nothing. This time I am determined to see, to bathe myself in the life of

the country. From Florence I shall make excursions into Tuscany and Umbria. And I shall end by going to Venice."

"You will do well. Venice is the Sabbath rest concluding Italy's great divine week of creation."

"Your friend Dechartre has been talking to me eloquently of Venice, of the pearl-like atmosphere of Venice."

"Yes, at Venice the sky is a painter. At Florence it is a spirit. An old author writes: 'The Florentine sky inspires men with beautiful ideas.' I have passed delightful days in Tuscany. I should like to go there again."

"Come and see me there."

But he murmured with a sigh: "Newspapers, reviews, one's daily work."

M. Martin-Bellème said that these were weighty reasons, and that the readers of Monsieur Paul Vence enjoyed his books and articles too much to wish him to be separated from his work.

"Oh! as for my books! . . . One never says anything in a book as one would really like to say it. It is impossible to render one's thoughts exactly! Yes, I know how to talk with my pen as well as any one. But talking, writing, how pitiable! When one comes to think of it, how trivial are those little signs which form syllables, words, and phrases. Among such hieroglyphics at once commonplace and bizarre what happens to the idea? What does the reader make of my written page? Either wrong sense or nonsense. To read, to understand is to translate. There may be fine translations; there are no accurate ones. What does it matter to me if they admire my books, since they always put into them what they admire? Every reader substitutes

his ideas for ours. All we do is to tickle his imagination. It is horrible to have to furnish material for such a proceeding. Ours is an infamous profession."

"You are joking," said M. Martin.

"I think not," said Thérèse. "He is suffering because he realises that no soul can see into another. He feels alone when he thinks, alone when he writes. Whatever one does one is always alone in this world. That's what he means. He is right. One may be always explaining oneself, one is never understood."

"But there are actions," said Paul Vence.

"Don't you think, Monsieur Vence, that they are a kind of hieroglyphics? Tell me about M. Choulette? I never see him now."

Vence replied that for the moment Choulette was very busy reforming the third order of St. Francis.

"The idea of this work, madame, occurred to him in a marvellous manner, one day when he was visiting Maria, at her lodging in the street behind the Hôtel Dieu, a street which has over-hanging houses and is always damp. Maria, you know, is the saint and martyr who atones for the sins of the people. He pulled the bell-rope worn out by two centuries of callers. The martyr was either at the tavern, which she frequents constantly, or busy in her room; she did not open the door. Choulette continued pulling, and so vigorously that the handle and the rope remained in his hand. Quick to conceive the symbolism and hidden meaning of things, he understood at once that the rope had not broken without the interposition of supernatural powers. Over this incident he pondered. The hemp was black and

sticky with dirt. He made a girdle of it and realised that he had been chosen to restore the third order of St. Francis to its primitive purity. He renounced the beauty of women, the delights of poetry, the brilliance of fame, to study the life and teaching of the blessed saint. Meanwhile he has sold his publisher a book entitled *Les Blandices,* which, he says, contains a description of every kind of love. He is proud of appearing in it as a criminal with an air of distinction. But this book will in no way interfere with his mystical enterprises. On the contrary, corrected by a subsequent work, it will appear exemplary; and the gold, or, as he says, the pieces of gold he received for it, which would not have been so many if the work had been more decent, will enable him to make a pilgrimage to Assisi."

Highly entertained, Madame Martin inquired how much truth there was in the story. Vence replied that she must not ask.

He half admitted that he idealised the poet's history, and that the adventures he related must not be interpreted in their literal and Hebraic sense. But he maintained that Choulette was actually publishing *Les Blandices* and that he wished to visit the cell and tomb of St. Francis.

"Then," cried Madame Martin, "I will take him to Italy. Monsieur Vence, find him and bring him here. I start next week."

M. Martin regretted having to leave them; but he had a report to finish, which must be given in the next day.

Madame Martin said that there was no one who interested her more than Choulette. Paul Vence also considered him a singular type of humanity.

"He does not greatly differ from those saints

whose wonderful lives one reads. Like them he is sincere, with the most sensitive feelings and terribly violent emotions. If many of his actions shock us it is because he is weaker, less self-controlled, or perhaps more closely observed than the saints of history. Besides, there are fallen saints as there are fallen angels. Choulette happens to be a fallen saint. But his poems are really spiritual, and much finer of the kind than any composed by the courtly bishops and dramatic poets of the seventeenth century."

She interrupted:

"While I think of it, I want to congratulate you on your friend Dechartre. He is extremely interesting. Perhaps a trifle too self-centred," she added. Vence reminded her that he had always said she would find Dechartre interesting.

"I know him by heart; he is a friend of my childhood."

"Did you know his family?"

"Yes; he is the only son of Philippe Dechartre."

"The architect?"

"The architect. He who under Napoleon III restored so many castles and churches in Touraine and the Orleanais. He was a man of both taste and knowledge. Although by nature reserved and gentle, he was so imprudent as to attack Viollet-le-Duc, who was then all-powerful. He reproached him with restoring buildings according to their original plan and making them what they had been or ought to have been in the beginning. Philippe Dechartre on the contrary would respect everything the centuries have gradually added to church, abbey, or château. To banish anachronisms and restore a building to its primitive unity appeared to him a barbarism of science as atrocious as that of ignorance. He was

always saying: It is a crime to efface what the hands and souls of our fathers have imprinted upon the stone throughout the ages. New stones cut in an old style are false witnesses! We would limit the work of the architect-archæologist to the strengthening and supporting of the structure. He was right; but no one agreed with him. He completed the failure of his career by dying young at the height of his rival's triumphs. Nevertheless he left his widow and son a modest fortune. Jacques Dechartre was brought up by an adoring mother. No mother ever loved her child more passionately. Jacques is a fine fellow, but he is a spoilt child."

"Nevertheless he appears so easy-going, so indifferent, so detached."

"Don't you believe it. His is a mind in itself restless and a cause of unrest in others."

"Does he like women?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I am not thinking of arranging a marriage for him."

"Yes, he does like women. I told you that he is an egoist. And only egoists really love women. After his mother's death, for a long while, he had an affair with a well-known actress, Jeanne Tancrède."

Madame Martin thought she remembered Jeanne Tancrède—not very pretty, but a fine figure, languidly graceful when playing the part of a woman in love.

"That is the woman," said Paul Vence. "They nearly always lived together in a little house in the *cité des Jasmins* at Auteuil. I often went to see them. I used to find him lost in his dreams, forgetting to model a figure drying beneath its linen covering; he would be rapt in revery, concerned only with his

own thoughts, quite incapable of listening to any one. She meanwhile would be studying her parts, her cheeks burning with rouge, love in her eyes, pretty in her intelligence and her energy. She used to complain to me that he was absent-minded, sullen, irritable. She really loved him, and never betrayed him, except to get a part. And when she did betray him it was quickly over, and afterwards she thought no more about it. She was a serious-minded woman. But she allowed herself to be seen with Joseph Springer, and cultivated his society in the hope that he would give her a part at the Comédie Française. Dechartre was vexed and parted from her. Now she finds it more convenient to live with her directors, and Jacques prefers to travel."

"Does he regret her?"

"How can one know the thoughts of a mind so restless and so versatile, so eager to give itself, so quick to take back the gift, so egotistical and so passionate? He loves with fervour whenever he finds the personification of his own ideals."

She changed the subject abruptly.

"And what about your novel. Monsieur Vence?"

"I am writing the last chapter. My poor little engraver has been guillotined. He died with the calm of a placid virgin who has never felt the warm breath of life on her lips. Newspapers and the public conventionally approve of the act of justice which has just been performed. But in a garret another artisan, a chemist, serious and sad, is swearing to avenge his brother's death."

He rose and took his leave.

She called him back.

"Monsieur Vence, you know I am in earnest. Bring me Choulette."

When she went up to her room her husband was waiting for her on the landing. He was wearing a reddish-brown frieze dressing-gown and a kind of doge's cap encircling his pale hollow face. He looked grave. Behind him, through the open door of his study, appeared under the lamp a pile of documents and the open blue-books of the annual budget. Before she entered her room he signed that he wished to speak to her.

"My dear, I don't understand you. Your inconsistency may do you harm. Without motive, without even an excuse, you abandon your home and travel through Europe, with whom? With this Choulette, a Bohemian, a drunkard."

She replied that she would travel with Madame Marmet, and there was nothing unconventional in that.

"But you are telling every one of your departure, and you don't yet know whether Madame Marmet can go with you."

"Oh, dear Madame Marmet can soon pack up and go. It would only be her dog that would detain her in Paris. She will leave him with you; you can look after him."

"And does your father know of your plans?"

When his own authority was defied it was always his last resource to invoke that of Montessuy. He knew that his wife was afraid of displeasing her father and giving him a bad opinion of her.

He insisted.

"Your father is full of common sense and tact. I have been so fortunate as to find myself in agreement with him in the advice I have given you on several occasions. Like me he considers that a woman in your position ought not to visit Madame

Meillan. Her society is very mixed and she is known to facilitate intrigues. I must tell you plainly that you make a great mistake in holding the opinion of society of so little account. I am very much mistaken if your father will not consider it strange for you to go off in this frivolous manner. And your absence will be all the more remarked because, permit me to remind you, throughout this session I have been very much in the public eye. In this matter my personal merit counts for nothing. But, if you had been willing to listen to me at dinner, I should have proved to you that the political group to which I belong is on the verge of coming into power. It is not at such a moment that you should forsake your duties as mistress of this house. You must understand this."

She replied: "You are boring me."

And, turning her back upon him, she shut herself in her room.

In bed that evening, as was her custom, she opened a book before falling asleep. It was a novel. Turning over its pages haphazard, she came upon these lines:

"Love is like devoutness in religion; it comes late. One is seldom either in love or devout at twenty, unless one has an unusual disposition, a kind of innate holiness. Even the elect strive long with that grace of loving which is more terrible than the lightning on the road to Damascus. A woman does not generally yield to the passion of love until age and solitude have ceased to alarm her. For passion is an arid desert, a burning Thebaid. Passion is a secular asceticism as severe as the asceticism of religion.

"Therefore a great passion is as rare in women as great religious devotion. Those who know life and

society know that women do not willingly wear upon their delicate bodies the hair-shirt of a true love. They know that nothing is rarer than a life-long sacrifice. And reflect how much a woman of the world must sacrifice when she loves: liberty, peace of mind, the charming play of a free imagination, coquetry, amusements, pleasures, she loses everything.

"Flirting is permitted to her. That is consistent with all the exigencies of a fashionable life. But not love. Love is the least worldly of the passions, the most anti-social, the wildest, the most barbarous. Therefore the world judges it more severely than gallantry and than profligacy. In one sense the world is right. A Parisian woman in love belies her nature, and fails to perform her function which is, like a work of art, to belong to us all. She is a work of art and the most marvellous that man's industry has ever produced. She is an enchanting artifice, resulting from the conjunction of all the mechanical arts and all the liberal arts; she is their common production, and she is the common good. Her duty is to show herself."

As Thérèse closed the book, she reflected that these were the dreams of novelists who did not know life. She knew well that in reality there existed no Mount of Passion, no hair-shirt of love, no terrible yet beautiful vocation against which the elect strove in vain; she knew that love was only a brief intoxication, which when it passes leaves one a little sorrowful. And yet, if after all she did not know everything, if there should be a love in which one might drown oneself with delight. . . . She put out her lamp. The dreams of her early youth returned to her from the dim background of her past.

VI

IT was raining. Through the streaming windows of her carriage, Madame Martin-Bellème dimly saw a multitude of umbrellas passing through the rain like tortoises. She was dreaming. Her thoughts were as misty and vague as the appearance of the streets and squares, rendered indistinct by the rain.

She could not remember how the idea had occurred to her of spending a month with Miss Bell. Indeed she had never realised why she had formed this resolution. It had been a spring hidden in the beginning beneath a few sprigs of water plantain, now it was a deep and rapid stream. She recollected that on Tuesday evening at dinner she had suddenly said that she wanted to go, but she could not trace her desire back to its origin. It was not a wish to act towards Robert le Ménil as he had acted towards her. Certainly it seemed to her excellent that she should be walking in the Cascine while he was hunting. It was pleasant and fitting. Robert, who was generally very pleased to see her after an absence, would not find her when he returned. It was good and just that he should have to submit to that disappointment. But she had not thought of that reason before her decision. And since she had seldom thought of it. It was really not the pleasure of making him vexed or the fun of a little act of vengeance that was the

motive for her departure. Her feeling towards him was not so keen as that, but harder, more serious. She was especially desirous to postpone their meeting. Without their having come to any rupture, he had become a stranger to her. He appeared a man like the rest, although better than most of them; very good looking, with excellent manners, an estimable character; a man she did not dislike, but who did not deeply interest her. He had suddenly passed out of her life. How intimately he had been associated with it she did not care to recall. The idea of belonging to him shocked her and seemed indecorous. The anticipation of meeting him again in the flat in the Rue Spontini was so painful that she banished it immediately from her mind. She preferred to believe that their reunion would be prevented by some event unforeseen but inevitable, the end of the world for example. The previous evening, at Madame de Morlaine's, M. Lagrange, of the Academy of Science, had spoken of a comet. One day, he said, coming from the depths of the firmament, and meeting this planet, it might envelop the earth in its flaming tail, burn it in its fire, breathe into its animals and plants unknown poisons, and slay the children of men who would die in frantic laughter or pass away in a dull stupor. Either that or something of that kind must happen before next month. Thus her desire to go away was not without an explanation. But why a vague joy should enter into her wish to depart, why she should feel herself already under the charm of what she was going to see, that she could not understand.

The carriage put her down at the corner of the narrow Rue de la Chaise.

There since her husband's death lived Madame

Marmet, in a small but very neat flat, on the top floor of a high house. Her five windows looked on a balcony and were brightened by the morning sun. It was her afternoon at home, and the Countess Martin had come to call. In the modest highly polished *salon,* she found M. Lagrange slumbering in an arm-chair opposite the kind lady, who looked sweet and tranquil beneath her crown of white hair.

This old scholar and man of the world had always been her faithful friend. On the day after Marmet's funeral it was he who had brought the unhappy widow Schmoll's waspish oration, and, thinking to console her, had beheld her consumed by grief and anger. She had fainted in his arms. Madame Marmet thought him lacking in judgment. He was her best friend. They often dined together at the tables of the rich.

Madame Martin, tall and beautiful, in her sable furs opening over a fall of lace, by the sparkling brilliance of her grey eyes, awoke the good man who was susceptible to feminine grace. The evening before, at Madame Morlaine's, he had described the end of the world. He asked her whether she had not been afraid when in the night watches there recurred to her those pictures of the earth eaten up by fire, or dead with cold and white as the moon. While he was talking to her with affected gallantry, she was looking at the mahogany book-case, which occupied a recess in the drawing-room wall opposite the windows. It contained few books, but on a lower shelf was a skeleton in armour. It was strange to find established in the kind lady's home this Etruscan warrior, wearing on his skull a helmet of greenish bronze and on his disjointed body the rusty plates of his cuirass. All unkempt and wild he slept

among sweet-meat boxes, gilded porcelain vases. holy virgins in plaster and delicate souvenirs of carved wood from Lucerne and the Righi. In the poverty of her widowhood, Madame Marmet had sold the books with which her husband worked; and of all the antiquities the archæologist had collected she had kept only the Etruscan. Her friends had tried to induce her to get rid of it. Marmet's former colleagues had found a purchaser. Paul Vence had persuaded the directors of the Louvre to offer to buy it. But the good widow would not sell it. She imagined that if she were to part with the warrior in his helmet of tarnished bronze crowned with a wreath of gilded leaves, she would forfeit that name she bore with such dignity and cease to be known as the widow of Louis Marmet of the Academy of Inscriptions.

"Be assured, Madame. The earth will not come into collision with a comet just yet. Such an event is extremely improbable."

Madame Martin replied that the immediate annihilation of the earth and humanity would matter little to her.

Old Lagrange strongly protested. He was extremely desirous that the catastrophe should be delayed.

She looked at him. On his bald head there remained but a few tufts of hair dyed black. His eyelids hung limply over his eyes, which were still bright; his wrinkled face was as yellow as parchment, and the hang of his clothes suggested a shrunken body.

And she thought: "He enjoys life."

Neither did Madame Marmet desire that the end of the world should be near.

"Monsieur Lagrange," said Madame Martin, "don't you live in a pretty little house, with windows overhung by wistaria, looking on to the Jardin des Plantes? It must be delightful to live in that Garden, which always reminds me of the Noah's Arks of my childhood and the Garden of Eden in the old picture Bible."

But he did not find the house delightful. It was small, badly built, and infested with rats.

She realised that every life had its vexations, and that everywhere there are rats, real or symbolic, legions of tiny creatures bent on tormenting us. Nevertheless she liked the Jardin des Plantes; she was always wanting to go there, but never went. There was the Museum too which she had never entered but was curious to visit.

Smiling and delighted he offered to do her the honours of the house. It was his home. He would show her the *bolides;* there were some very fine specimens.

She had no idea what a *bolide* was. But she remembered having been told that in the Museum there were reindeers' bones worked by primitive man, and pieces of ivory engraved with pictures of animals long since extinct. She asked if it were true. Lagrange had lost his smile. He replied with sullen indifference that these matters concerned one of his colleagues.

"Ah!" said Madame Martin, "they are not in your line."

She perceived that scholars lack curiosity and that it is unwise to question them about anything which is not in their department. It is true that thunderbolts had made Lagrange's fortune in science. And that they had led him to the study of

comets. But he was prudent. For twenty years his chief occupation had been dining out.

When he had gone, Countess Martin told Madame Marmet what she had planned for her.

"Next week I am going to Fiesole, to Miss Bell's, and you must come with me."

Kind Madame Marmet, keen eyed beneath her placid brow, was silent for a moment; then she refused feebly, but was entreated and at last consented.

VII

HE Marseilles express was drawn up at the platform, where porters were hurrying to and fro, pushing their trucks in the smoke and the noise and the blue light that fell through the glass of the roof. Before the open carriage doors travellers in long cloaks came and went. At the extreme end of the station, half veiled by dust and smoke, there appeared, just as if at the end of a telescope, a little arch of sky. No bigger than a man's hand, it represented the infinitude of travel: Countess Martin and kind Madame Marmet were already seated in their carriage beneath a rack loaded with bags; and newspapers were lying near them on the cushions. Choulette had not come, and Madame Martin had given him up. Nevertheless he had promised to be at the station. He had made arrangements for his departure and received the money for *Les Blandices* from his publisher. One evening Paul Vence had brought him to the Quai de Billy. He had been gentle, polite, wittily gay and naïvely happy. Since then she had looked forward with great pleasure to travelling with a man of genius, so original, so fascinatingly ugly, so entertainingly mad, such a thorough old prodigal, so abounding in natural vices and yet so innocent. They were shutting the carriage doors. He was

evidently not coming. She had been foolish to rely on any one so impulsive and Bohemian. Just as the engine was beginning to snort, Madame Marmet, looking out of the window, said calmly:

"I think I see M. Choulette."

He was limping down the platform, wearing his hat on the back of his head, which showed some curious bumps. His beard was untrimmed and he was dragging an old carpet-bag. His aspect was almost terrifying; and yet in spite of his fifty years he looked young; his bright blue eyes shone clearly and there was an ingenuous audacity in his furrowed yellow face; for in this dilapidated old man there still flourished the eternal youth of the poet and the artist. As she looked at him, Thérèse regretted having chosen so strange a companion. As he walked down the train he cast into each carriage a quick glance which became gradually suspicious and sinister. But when he reached the carriage in which the two ladies were, and recognized Madame Martin, he smiled so gracefully and bade her good-day in such a soft voice, that there was no longer anything to suggest the wild vagabond, who had been wandering on the platform, except the old carpet-bag which he was dragging by its half-broken handles.

He put it carefully in the rack side by side with the trim bags, covered with grey linen, which made it look tawdry and common, and showed up its yellow flowers on a ground of blood-red.

Quite at his ease he congratulated Madame Martin on the capes of her travelling-coat.

"Forgive me, ladies," he added, "I fear I am late. I went to six o'clock mass at Saint-Séverin, my parish church, in the Lady Chapel beneath those

beautiful but incongruous reed-like pillars climbing heavenwards like us poor sinners."

"So to-day you are pious," said Madame Martin.

And she asked whether he had brought the cord of the order he had founded.

He became sad and grave.

"I am afraid, Madame, that M. Paul Vence has told you some absurd tales on that subject. I have heard that he goes about saying that my cord is a bell-rope! I should be sorry to think that any one should for a moment believe such a wicked story. My cord is symbolic. It is represented by a thread worn next the skin, after having been touched by a poor person as a sign that poverty is holy and will save the world. Goodness is impossible without poverty; and since receiving the money for my *Blandices,* I have felt myself growing hard and unjust. It does me good to remember that I have a few of these mystic cords in my bag."

And, pointing to the hideous blood-red bag:

"I have also got there a wafer, given me by a bad priest, the works of M. de Maistre, a few shirts and several other things."

Madame Martin, somewhat alarmed, raised her eyebrows. But kind Madame Marmet retained her accustomed placidity.

Whilst the train was going through the suburbs, that ugly black fringe of the town, Choulette took out a pocket-book and began to look in it. Beneath the vagabond the scribe was revealing himself. Choulette was fond of hoarding documents, although he did not wish to appear to do so. He made sure that he had lost nothing, neither the scraps of paper with ideas for his poems jotted down in a café, nor the dozen complimentary letters, dirty,

finger-marked, ragged at the folds, which he always carried and read at night beneath the gas lamps to any chance acquaintance he might happen to meet. Having seen that everything was there he took a letter in an unsealed envelope out of his pocket-book. He fidgeted with it for some time with an air of rather imprudent mystery and then gave it to the Countess Martin. It was a letter of introduction, given him by the Marchioness of Rieu, to a princess of the French royal family, a very near relative of the Comte de Chambord, who, old and widowed, lived in retirement near the gates of Florence. Having enjoyed the effect which he thought this letter must have produced, he remarked that he might perhaps call on the Princess; she was a good pious person.

"She is a real fine lady," he added, "one who does not display her magnificence in her gowns and hats. She wears her underclothing six weeks and sometimes longer. The noblemen of her suite have seen her wearing very dirty white stockings hanging over her shoes. She revives the virtues of the great queens of Spain. Those dirty stockings are a true glory."

He took back the letter and restored it to his pocket-book. Then, having armed himself with a horn-handled knife, he began to carve a figure already half finished on the handle of his walking stick. Meanwhile he was pronouncing a eulogy on himself.

"I am skilled in all the arts of beggars and vagabonds. I know how to open locks with a nail and carve wood with a cheap clasp-knife."

The head was beginning to be defined. It was the thin face of a woman weeping.

Choulette meant it to express human suffering, not in its touching simplicity as in an earlier civilisation when barbarism was mingled with goodness, nor painted and hideous with that ugliness into which it had been degraded by the middle-class freethinkers and the militarist patriots, the children of the French Revolution. In his opinion the present government was the personification of hypocrisy and brutality.

"Barracks are a horrible invention of modern times. They originated in the seventeenth century. Formerly there was nothing but the guard-house, where veterans played cards and told fairy stories. Louis XIV is the precursor of the Convention and of Bonaparte. But the evil has come to a head in the monstrous institution of universal military service. To have forced men to kill each other is the disgrace of emperors and republics, the crime of crimes. In the so-called barbarous ages, cities and princes entrusted their defence to mercenaries who made war deliberately and prudently; in some great battles there were only five or six slain. And when the knights engaged in war they were not forced to it; they were killed of their own free will. It is true they were good for nothing else. In the days of Saint Louis no one would have dreamt of sending a man of learning and intelligence into battle. Neither was the labourer dragged from his plough and forced to join the army. Now it is considered the duty of a poor peasant to serve as a soldier. Now he is driven from his home with its chimneys smoking in the golden evening light, from the fat meadows where his oxen are grazing, from his cornfields and ancestral woods. In the court-yard of some miserable barracks he is taught how to

kill men methodically; he is threatened, insulted, imprisoned; he is told that it is an honour, and if he desire no such honour, he is shot. He obeys, because like all the gentlest, gayest, and most docile domestic animals, he is afraid. We in France are soldiers and we are citizens. Our citizenship is another occasion for pride! For the poor it consists in supporting and maintaining the rich in their power and their idleness. At this task they must labour in the face of the majestic equality of the laws, which forbid rich and poor alike to sleep under the bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal their bread. This equality is one of the benefits of the Revolution. Why, that revolution was effected by madmen and idiots for the benefit of those who had acquired the wealth of the crown. It resulted in the enrichment of cunning peasants and money-lending *bourgeois*. In the name of equality it founded the empire of wealth. It delivered France to those moneyed classes who have been devouring her for a century. Now they are our lords and masters. The so-called government, composed of poor creatures, pitiable, miserable, impoverished, and complaining, is in the pay of financiers. Throughout the last hundred years any one caring for the poor in this plague-stricken country has been held a traitor to society. And you are considered dangerous if you assert that there are those who suffer poverty. There are even laws against indignation and pity. But what I am saying now cannot be printed."

While Choulette was growing animated and brandishing his knife, they were passing fields of brown earth, clumps of purple trees that winter had robbed of their leaves, and curtains of poplars on the banks of silver rivers, lying in the winter sunshine.

He looked pathetically at the figure carved upon his stick.

"There you are," he said, "poor Humanity, emaciated and in tears, stupefied by shame and poverty, such as you have been made by your masters, the soldier and the plutocrat."

Kind Madame Marmet, whose nephew was a captain of artillery, a charming young man, strongly attached to his profession, was shocked by the violence of Choulette's attack upon the army. Madame Martin regarded it as an amusing caprice. Choulette's ideas did not alarm her. She was afraid of nothing. But she thought them rather absurd; she could not conceive that the past could ever have been better than the present.

"I believe, Monsieur Choulette, that men have always been what they are to-day, selfish, violent, greedy, and pitiless. I believe that the unfortunate have always been harshly and cruelly treated by laws and customs."

Between La Roche and Dijon, they lunched in the restaurant-car, and then left Choulette there alone with his pipe, his glass of Benedictine, and his vexed soul.

When they had returned to their carriage, Madame Marmet talked with tranquil affection of her dead husband. Theirs was a love match. He had written her beautiful verses, which she kept and showed to no one. He was vivacious and gay. No one would have believed it possible that he would ever succumb to overwork and disease. He had laboured till the very last. Suffering from an enlarged heart, he could never lie down, and used to pass the night in his arm-chair, with his books on a table at his side. Only two hours before his death

he made an effort to read. He was kind and affectionate. His sufferings never rendered him irritable.

For lack of anything better, Madame Martin said:

"You have the memory of long years of happiness, and in this world that is to have a share of good fortune."

But Madame Marmet sighed; and a cloud overshadowed her tranquil brow.

"Yes," she said, "Louis was the best of men and the best of husbands. Nevertheless, he made me very unhappy. He had only one fault, but I suffered bitterly from it. He was jealous. He who was otherwise so kind, so affectionate, and so noble-minded was rendered unjust, tyrannical, and violent by that hateful passion. I can assure you that my conduct gave no ground for suspicion. I was not a coquette. But I was young and fresh-looking; I was considered almost pretty. That was enough. He forbade me to go out alone or receive callers in his absence. When we went to a ball together, I trembled in anticipation of the scene he would make in the carriage on our way home."

And kind Madame Marmet added with a sigh:

"It is true that I loved dancing. But I was obliged to give it up. It pained him too much."

Countess Martin did not conceal her surprise. She had always regarded Marmet as a shy self-absorbed old gentleman, appearing rather ridiculous between his corpulent wife, with her white hair and her sweet temper, and the skeleton of his Etruscan warrior in its gilded bronze helmet. But the excellent widow confided to her that when he was fifty-five and she fifty-three, Louis was as jealous as in the early days of their married life.

Thérèse remembered that Robert had never troubled her by his jealousy. Was it a proof of his tact and good taste or had he never loved her enough to be jealous? She did not know and she had not the courage to inquire. It would have involved searching in those secret chambers of her heart which she had decided never to open again.

She murmured almost involuntarily.

"We want to be loved; and when we are loved we are either tormented or bored."

They closed the day with reading and meditation. Choulette had not reappeared. Night was gradually casting a grey veil over the mulberry trees of Dauphiné. Madame Marmet slept peacefully, her head resting on her breast as if on a pillow. Thérèse looked at her and thought:

"She is happy indeed if she can take delight in recalling the past."

The sadness of the night seemed to enter into her heart. And when the moon rose over the olive fields, as she gazed upon the soft outline of plains and hills and the fleeting blue shadows, surrounded by a landscape in which everything suggested peace and oblivion, Thérèse longed for the Seine, the Arc de Triomphe with its radiating avenues, and the glades of the Bois, where at least the trees and stones knew her.

Suddenly, with an artful abruptness, Choulette precipitated himself into the carriage. Armed with his knotted stick, his head enveloped in rough fur and a red shawl, he almost alarmed her. That was what he wanted. His violent pose and savage mien were affectations.

Always occupied with bizarre and trivial effects it was his delight to appear alarming. Himself very

easily frightened, he liked to inspire the terror he experienced. Smoking his pipe alone at the end of the passage only a few moments before, as he saw the moon behind the fleeting clouds, over the Camargue, his imaginative, versatile soul had been struck by childish fears. He had come to take refuge with Countess Martin.

"Arles," he said. "Do you know Arles? It is pure beauty! In the cloisters of St. Trophimus I have seen doves perched on the shoulders of statues, and little grey lizards warming themselves on the tombs in the Aliscamps. The tombs are now arranged on each side of the road leading to the church. They are cistern-shaped, and at night beggars sleep in them. One evening, as I was walking with Paul Arène, I met a nice old woman who was spreading dried grass in the tomb of a virgin who died long ago on her wedding-day. We wished her good-night. She replied: 'May God hear you. But an evil fate has willed that this cistern should be open to the north-west wind. If only the crack had been on the other side, I should have slept like Queen Jane.' "

Thérèse did not reply. She was sleepy. And Choulette, shivering in the night cold, thought of death and was afraid.

VIII

ISS BELL had driven the Countess Martin-Bellème and Madame Marmet in her trap from the Florence station, up the steep hill, to her house at Fiesole, painted pink, surrounded by a balustrade, and looking down on the incomparable city. The maid was following with the luggage. Choulette, whom Miss Bell had quartered on a verger's widow in the shadow of Fiesole cathedral, was to come to dinner. Pleasant and plain, with short hair and slim, flat figure, almost graceful in her tailor-made coat and skirt of masculine cut, the poetess welcomed her French friends to her home. The house betrayed the refined delicacy of her taste. On the drawing-room walls pale virgins of Sienna, with long hands, reigned tranquilly over angels, patriarchs, and saints in triptychs with fine gilded mouldings. On a pedestal was a standing figure of a Magdalen, enveloped in her long hair, terribly old and wasted, some beggar on the road to Pistoia, her skin hardened by sun and snow, copied in clay, with horrible pathetic realism, by an unknown precursor of Donatello. And Miss Bell's armorial bearings, big bells and little bells, were everywhere. The largest, in bronze, were in the corners of the room; others formed a chain round the bottom of the walls. Smaller ones bordered the cornice. There were bells

on the stove, on the coffers and the cabinets. There were glass cases full of bells in silver and silver gilt. There were big bronze bells engraved with the Florentine lily, little Renaissance bells composed of a woman wearing a full farthingale, funeral bells decorated with tears and bones, filigree bells, covered with leaves and symbolic animals, which rang in churches in the days of St. Louis, table bells of the seventeenth century with a statuette for handle, little flat clear-sounding cow-bells of the Rutli valleys, Indian bells made to ring softly with a stag's horn, Chinese bells of cylindrical form; they had come there from all countries and from all times in obedience to the magic summons of this little Miss Bell.

"You are looking at my vocal coats of arms," she said to Madame Martin. "I think all those Misses Bell are happy here, and it would not astonish me if one day they began to sing together. But you must not admire them all equally. You must keep your highest praise for this one."

As she struck with her finger a dark plain bell, there resounded a shrill note:

"This one," she resumed, "is a holy countrywoman of the fifth century. She is the daughter in the faith of Paulinus of Nola, he who first made music in the sky above us. It is made of a rare metal, called Campanian brass. Soon I will show you at her side a most charming Florentine, the queen of bells. She is to come. But I am wearying you with these toys, darling. And I am boring kind Madame Marmet also. It is too bad of me."

She took them to their rooms.

An hour later, Madame Martin, refreshed and rested, in a tea-gown of soft silk and lace, came down

on the terrace, where Miss Bell was waiting for her. The damp air, warmed by the sunlight, not yet strong but already abundant, breathed the disquieting sweetness of spring. Thérèse, leaning against the balustrade, bathed her eyes in the light. At her feet the cypresses raised their dark pyramids and the olive trees clustered on the slopes. In the hollow of the valley was Florence with its domes, its towers, the multitude of its red roofs, among which was faintly discernible the winding thread of the Arno. Beyond were the blue hills.

She tried to make out the Boboli gardens, where she had walked during a previous visit, the Cascine, which she did not care for, the Pitti Palace, Santa Maria del Fiore. Then the glorious spaces of the sky attracted her. She followed the fleeting forms of the clouds.

After a long silence, Vivian Bell stretched out her hand towards the horizon.

"Darling, I cannot express myself, I don't know how to say it. But look, darling, look again. What you see is unique. Nowhere else is nature so subtle, so elegant, so delicate. The god who created the Florentine hills was an artist. Yes, he was a worker in jewels, an engraver of medals, a sculptor, a bronze founder, and a painter; he was a Florentine. And he produced nothing else, darling. The rest is the work of a less delicate hand, a less perfect creation. How could that violet hill of San Miniato, standing out in such pure and firm relief, be by the author of Mont Blanc? It is not possible. This landscape, darling, has all the beauty of an ancient medal and a costly painting. It is a perfect and harmonious work of art. And there is something else that I can't express, that I can't understand, and yet it is true.

In this country I feel, and you will feel like me, darling, half alive and half dead, in a state very noble, very sad and very sweet. Look, look well; you will discern the melancholy of these hills which surround Florence, and you will behold a delicious sadness ascending from the Country of the Dead."

The sun was declining towards the horizon. One by one the lights faded from the hills and the clouds became on fire.

Madame Marmet sneezed.

Miss Bell had shawls brought and warned her French guests that the evenings were cold and dangerous.

Then suddenly she said:

"Darling, do you know M. Jacques Dechartre? Well, he writes that he is coming to Florence next week. I am glad that M. Jacques Dechartre should be in our city at the same time as you. He will go with us to churches and museums; and he will be a good guide. He understands beautiful things because he loves them. His sculpture is exquisite. His figures and medallions are even more highly appreciated in England than in France. Oh! I am so glad that M. Jacques Dechartre will be at Florence with you, darling!"

IX

HE next day, as they were coming out of Santa Maria Novella, and crossing the square, where, as in an ancient circus, stand two obelisks of marble, Madame Marmet said to Countess Martin: "I think I see Monsieur Choulette."

Sitting in a cobbler's booth, pipe in hand, Choulette was gesticulating rhythmically, and appeared to be reciting verses. The Florentine shoemaker, as he worked with his awl, was listening with a good-natured smile. He was a little bald man, a favourite type in Flemish pictures. On the table, among the wooden lasts, nails, pieces of leather, and balls of wax, was a basil plant. A sparrow with a false leg, made of a bit of match, was hopping gaily from the old man's shoulder to his head.

Delighted at such a sight, Madame Martin stood on the threshold and called Choulette, who was reciting in a soft, singing voice, and asked him why he had not come with her to visit the Cappella degli Spagnuoli.

He rose and replied:

"Madame, you are occupied with vain imaginings. I am concerned with life and reality."

He shook hands with the cobbler, and followed the two ladies.

"On my way to Santa Maria Novella," he said,

"I saw this old man, leaning over his work, holding the last between his knees as if in a vice, and stitching clumsy shoes. I felt that he was simple and good. I said to him in Italian, 'Father, will you drink a glass of Chianti with me?' He was quite willing. He went to fetch a bottle and glasses, while I minded his shop."

And Choulette pointed to two glasses and a bottle standing on the stove.

"When he returned we drank together; I repeated good words of obscure meaning, the music of which delighted him. I shall return to his booth. I shall learn from him how to make shoes and live a contented life. After that I shall never know sadness, which arises solely from discontent and idleness."

Countess Martin smiled.

"Monsieur Choulette, I am not discontented, and yet I am not gay. Must I also learn to make shoes?"

Choulette replied gravely:

"Not yet."

When they reached the Oricellari Gardens, Madame Marmet dropped on to a seat. At Santa Maria Novella she had carefully examined the serene frescoes of Ghirlandajo, the choir-stalls, the virgin of Cimabuë, and the pictures in the monastery. She had taken great pains in honour of her husband's memory, who was said to have loved Italian art. She was tired. Choulette sat down by her and said:

"Could you tell me, Madame, if it is true that the Pope has his robes made by Worth?"

Madame Marmet did not think so. Nevertheless, Choulette had heard it in the cafés. Madame Martin was surprised that Choulette, a Catholic and a Socialist, should speak so disrespectfully of a Pope

who was the friend of the Republic. But he had little admiration for Leo XIII.

"The wisdom of princes is short-sighted," he said. "The Church's salvation will be effected by the Italian Republic; and this is what Leo XIII believes and desires; but the Church will not be saved in the way that pious Machiavelli expects: the revolution will deprive the Pope of his iniquitous tribute with the rest of his temporal dominion. And that will be the salvation of the papacy. Poor and stripped of his temporal power, the Pope will once more be powerful. He will move the world. The Peters, the Linuses, the Cletuses, the Anacletuses, the Clements,* the humble, the ignorant, the saints of early times who changed the face of the earth, will return. If such an impossible thing were to happen as that to-morrow there were to sit in the chair of St. Peter a true bishop, a true Christian, I should go to him and say: 'Cease to be an old man buried alive in a golden tomb. Leave your chamberlains, your noble body-guards, and your cardinals; abandon your throne and the empty shows of power. Come, and, supported by me, beg your bread from the nations. Ragged, poor, sick, dying, bear in yourself the image of Jesus. Say, I beg my bread in order that the rich may be reproached. Enter the towns and cry from door to door: Be humble, be gentle, be poor! Proclaim peace and charity in dark cities, in barracks, and in miserable hovels. You will be despised, you will be stoned. Soldiers will drag you to prison. To the humble as to the powerful, to the poor as to the rich, you will be a laughing-stock, a

* St. Peter, St. Linus, St. Cletus, St. Clement, St. Anacletus are said to have been the first five Popes, A.D. 65-109 (*cf.* Butler's "Lives of the Saints.")—W. S.

subject for disgust and pity. Your priests will depose you and elect an anti-pope. Every one will call you mad. And they must speak the truth; for you must be mad: the world has always been saved by madmen. Men will crown you with a crown of thorns, and put in your hands a sceptre of reeds; and by these signs they shall know you to be the Christ, the true King. By these means you shall establish Christian socialism, which is the kingdom of God on earth.' "

Having thus spoken, Choulette lit a long Italian cigar with a straw running through the middle. He inhaled a few whiffs of noxious smoke and then tranquilly resumed:

"And it would be quite practical. I am nothing if not clear-headed. Ah! Madame Marmet, you will never know how true it is that the great tasks of the world have always been accomplished by madmen. Do you think, Madame Martin, that if St. Francis of Assisi had been reasonable, he could have shed abroad among the nations the living waters of charity and quickened them with the perfumes of love?"

"I do not know," replied Madame Martin. "But I always find reasonable persons very wearisome. I need not hesitate to say this to you, Monsieur Choulette."

They returned up the hill to Fiesole by steam tram. It was raining. Madame Marmet fell asleep, and Choulette grumbled. He was overwhelmed with misfortunes: the dampness of the atmosphere gave him pains in the knee and he couldn't bend his leg; his carpet-bag, lost on the way from the station to Fiesole, couldn't be found, and that was an irreparable disaster; a Parisian review had just published one of his poems with glaring misprints.

He accused men and things of being against him, bent on his ruin. He was childish, absurd, disagreeable. Madame Martin, depressed by Choulette and by the rain, thought the ascent would never come to an end. When she entered the house of bells, she found Miss Bell in the drawing-room. In a handwriting modelled on the Aldine type she was copying, in golden ink, on to a piece of parchment, the verses she had composed during the night. At the sight of her friend, she raised her plain little face, glorified by her fine brilliant eyes.

"Darling, let me introduce Prince Albertinelli."

The prince, in all the beauty of a young Adonis, humanised by a straight black beard, was standing near the stove. He bowed to Madame Martin.

"Madame would inspire us with a love for France had not that sentiment already taken root in our hearts," he said.

The Countess and Choulette asked Miss Bell to read them the verses she was writing. She said it would be impossible for her to make her halting numbers comprehensible to the French poet whom she admired most after François Villon; then, in her pretty, shrill, birdlike voice, she recited:

Where the stream, like a water-sprite, laughing and singing,
And waving cool arms, to the Arno down-springing,
In spray-lifting leaps, skips o'er rugged rock-ledges,
Two comely young lovers changed rings as love's pledges.
And the transport of love in their bosoms was swelling,
As the riotous drops in the torrent upwelling,
The maiden was Gemma, but name for her lover
No chronicler ever was known to discover.

As day followed day, lips to lips closely pressing,
With arms interlaced in their artless carressing,
The goats cropping thyme all unstartled would brook them,
Till at eve to their home in town they betook them.

And there the tired toilers, 'neath linden trees seated,
The dream-enwrapped lovers nor heeded nor greeted.
Yet they wept when they thought there remained not to capture
From life, aught of bliss that could heighten their rapture.

In that meadow where first they gave ear to love's singing,
Where like as the vine to the green elm-tree clinging,
O'erarched by the sky their first kisses they blended,
Its blood-tinted petals a strange plant extended,
All lance-like and wan were the leaves of its growing,
Herb of Silence its name of the shepherds' bestowing.

And Gemma was 'ware it was potent in lending
The slumber eternal, the dream without ending,
To all who should taste its ineffable savour.

One day, 'neath the branches with breezes a-quaver,
With a leaflet she parted the lips of her lover,
And straightway Elysium received him, a rover;
Then she, of the peace-bringing leaf having tasted,
In pursuit of her love to the silent shades hasted.

And the dove, that at twilight complains as it hovers,
Alone breaks the silence enwrapping the lovers.*

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* "Lors au pied des rochers où la source penchante,
Pareille à la Naïade et qui rit et qui chante,
Agite ses bras frais et vole vers l'Arno,
Deux beaux enfants avaient échangé leur anneau,
Et le bonheur d'aimer coulait dans leurs poitrines
Comme l'eau du torrent au versant des collines.
Elle avait nom Gemma. Mais l'amant de Gemma,
Nul entre les conteurs jamais ne le nomma.

Le jour, ces innocents, la bouche sur la bouche,
Mêlaient leurs jeunes corps dans la sauvage couche
De thym que visitait la chèvre. Et vers le soir,
À l'heure où l'artisan fatigué va s'asseoir
Sous les tilleuls, surpris, ils regagnaient la ville.
Nul n'avait souci d'eux dans la foule servile,
Et souvent ils pleuraient, se sentant trop heureux
Ile comprirent que vivre était mauvais pour eux.

"That is very pretty," said Choulette; "it suggests an Italy veiled in the mists of the Land of Thule."

"Yes," said Countess Martin, "it is pretty. But my dear Vivian, why did your two innocents want to die?"

"Why, darling! because they felt as happy as possible, and they desired nothing more. Nothing was left to them to hope for. Don't you understand?"

"Then you believe that hope keeps us alive?"

"Yes, darling, we live in the expectation of what To-morrow, To-morrow, King of Fairyland, will bring in his mantle of black or blue, embroidered with flowers, with stars, and with tears. Oh bright king To-morrow!"

Or, dans cette prairie où déchirés de joie,
Ils étaient l'orme vert et la vigne qui ploie,
Et tordaient sous le ciel leur rameau gémissant,
S'élevait une plante étrange, aux fleurs de sang,
Qui dardait son feuillage en pâles fers de lance.
Les bergers la nommaient la Plante du silence.

Et Gemma le savait, que le sommeil divin
Et l'éternal repos et le rêve sans fin
Viendraient de cette plante à qui l'aurait mordue.

Un jour qu'elle riait sous l'arbuste étendue,
Elle en mit une feuille aux lèvres de l'ami.
Quand il fut dans la joie à jamais endormi,
Elle mordit aussi la feuille bien-aimée.
Aux pieds de son amant elle tomba pâmée.

Les colombes au soir sur eux vinrent gémir,
Et rien plus ne troubla leur amoureux dormir."

X

THEY were dressed for dinner. In the drawing-room Miss Bell was drawing monsters, suggested by those of Leonardo da Vinci. She created them in order to see what they would say, convinced that they would speak and express rare ideas in curious rhymes. Then she would listen to them. It was thus that she generally conceived her poems.

Prince Albertinelli was strumming on the piano the Sicilian air, *O Lola!* His fingers passed lightly over the keys.

Choulette, more uncouth than usual, was asking for a needle and thread with which to mend his clothes. He was groaning over the loss of a modest needle-case he had carried in his pocket for thirty years, and which was precious on account of the sweet memories it recalled and the wise counsels it suggested. He thought he must have lost it in that impious hall of the Pitti Palace, and he held the Medicis and all the Italian painters responsible.

Looking at Miss Bell reproachfully, he said:

"I compose my poems when I am mending my clothes. I take delight in manual labour. I sing my songs as I sweep my room. That is why those songs go straight to the hearts of men, like the old songs of ploughmen and artisans, which are more beautiful than mine, but not more natural. I take a pride in

waiting on myself. The verger's widow offered to mend my rags. I would not permit it. It is wrong to employ others to do servilely what we could ourselves accomplish in noble freedom."

The Prince was playing slight airs mechanically. Thérèse, who for the last week had been visiting churches and museums with Madame Marmet, was meditating on the vexation her companion caused her by insisting on recognising resemblances to persons among her acquaintance in the portraits by the old masters. That morning at the Riccardi Palace, merely in the frescoes of Benozzo Gozzoli, she had recognised M. Garain, M. Lagrange, M. Schmoll, Princess Seniavine dressed as a page, and M. Renan on horseback. M. Renan she was quite alarmed to find everywhere. Her ideas were always revolving around her little academical and social circle with a facility which annoyed her friend. In her sweet voice she was always describing the public meetings of the Institute, lectures at the Sorbonne, assemblies adorned by fashionable theosophists. As for the women, in her opinion they were all charming and irreproachable. She visited them all. And Thérèse reflected: "Kind Madame Marmet! She is too discreet. She bores me." And Madame Marmet thought of leaving her behind at Fiesole and visiting the churches alone. She said to herself, using an expression that Le Ménil had taught her:

"I must drop Madame Marmet."

A thin old man entered the drawing-room. His waxed moustache and little white pointed beard made him look like an old officer. But beneath his spectacles his glance betrayed the cunning geniality of eyes worn out in the service of science and pleasure. He was a Florentine, a friend of Miss Bell's, and

of the Prince, Professor Arrighi, once adored by women, now famous throughout Tuscany and the Emilia * for his essays on agriculture.

Countess Martin liked him at once. Although she had not been favourably impressed by rural life in Italy, she carefully questioned the Professor concerning his methods and their results.

He proceeded, he said, with energy tempered by prudence.

"The earth," he continued, "is like a woman. She requires you to be neither timid nor brutal."

The Ave Maria sounding from all the campanili converted the sky into one vast musical instrument playing religious music.

"Darling," said Miss Bell, "do you hear how in the evening the air of Florence is sonorous and tinkling with the sound of bells?"

"It is strange," said Choulette, "but we all seem as if we were waiting for some one."

Vivian Bell replied that they were indeed waiting for some one, for M. Dechartre. He was rather late. She was afraid he must have missed his train.

Choulette went up to Madame Marmet and said very gravely:

"Madame Marmet, can you ever look at a door, a simple door of painted wood, like yours for instance or mine, on that one or any other, without being filled with fear and horror at the thought of the visitor who may enter at any moment? The door of our dwelling opens into the infinite. Have you ever thought of it? Do we ever know the true name of him or her, who, in human form, with a familiar face, in commonplace clothes, enters our house?"

* A district composed of three duchies, Parma, Piacenza, and Modena.—W.S.

For his part, shut up in his own room, he could never look at the door without fear making his hair stand on end.

But Madame Marmet was able to look at her drawing-room doors without experiencing the slightest alarm. She knew the names of all her visitors; all delightful people.

Choulette looked at her sadly and shook his head:

"Madame Marmet, Madame Marmet, those whom you call by their earthly names have another name, which you do not know, but which is their true name."

Madame Martin asked Choulette if he believed that when misfortune descended upon people there was any need for it to cross the threshold.

"It is subtle and ingenious. It comes through the window, it passes through walls. It is not always seen, but it is always there. The poor doors are quite innocent of the advent of this evil visitor."

Choulette reproached Madame Martin severely for calling the advent of misfortune evil.

"Misfortune is our greatest master and our best friend. It teaches us the meaning of life. Ladies, when you suffer, you will know what you ought to know, you will believe what you ought to believe, you will do what you ought to do, you will be what you ought to be. And you will possess that joy which pleasure banishes. Joy is shy and delights not in feasting."

Prince Albertinelli said that neither Miss Bell nor her two French friends needed misfortune to make them perfect, and that the doctrine of perfection through suffering was barbarously cruel and held in horror beneath the beautiful Italian sky. Then,

when conversation languished, he returned to the piano and tried to finger out the melody of the graceful conventional Sicilian air, fearing to glide into the somewhat similar one in *Il Trovatore*.

Vivian Bell was questioning in whispers the monsters she had created and grumbling at their absurd jesting replies.

"At this moment," she said, "I only want to listen to tapestry figures talking of things pale, ancient, and as precious as they."

And now the handsome Prince was singing, carried away on the flood of melody. His voice swelled, spread itself out like a peacock's tail, and then died away softly.

Kind Madame Marmet, with her eyes on the glass door, said:

"I think here is M. Dechartre."

He entered with a vivacious animated air. His face, generally grave, was beaming with joy.

Miss Bell welcomed him with little bird-like cries.

"Monsieur Dechartre, we were growing very impatient. M. Choulette was speaking evil of doors. Yes, doors in houses; and he was saying that misfortune is an obliging old gentleman. You have lost all these fine things. You have kept us waiting, Monsieur Dechartre; why?"

He made his excuses: he had barely had time to go to his hotel and dress quickly. He had not even been to greet his dear good friend the bronze San Marco, so pathetic in its niche, on the wall of Or San Michele. He complimented the poetess and greeted Countess Martin with an ill-concealed delight.

"Before leaving Paris, I called at your house on the Quai de Billy, where I was told that you had

gone to meet the spring at Miss Bell's at Fiesole. Then I hoped I might find you in that country which now I love more than ever."

She asked him if he had been first to Venice and to Ravenna to see the haloed empresses and the glistening phantoms.

No, he had not stayed anywhere.

She said nothing. Her glance remained fixed on one corner of the wall on the bell of St. Paulinus.

He said:

"You are looking at the bell from Nola."

Vivian threw down her papers and pencils.

"You will soon see a marvel which will appeal to you more than that, M. Dechartre. I have discovered the queen of little bells. I found it at Rimini, in a ruined wine-press, which is now being used as a shop, where I had gone for some old wood saturated with oil, hard, dark, and shiny. I bought the bell and had it packed myself. I shall not live until it arrives. You will see. On its cup is a Christ on the Cross, between the Virgin and St. John, with the date 1400 and the arms of Malatesta.

"Monsieur Dechartre, you are not attending. You must listen. In 1400, Lorenzo Ghiberti, who was fleeing from war and plague, had taken refuge at Rimini with Paolo Malatesta. It must certainly have been he who modelled the figures on my bell. Next week you will see a work by Ghiberti here."

Dinner was announced. She asked them to pardon her giving them an Italian dinner. Her cook was a poet of Fiesole.

At table, before the *fiasconi*, encased in maize straw, they talked of that blessed fifteenth century that they loved. Prince Albertinelli praised the universality of the artists of that period, their passion-

ate love of art and their genius. He spoke emphatically, in a caressing voice.

Dechartre admired them, but in a different manner.

"An appropriate eulogy," he said, "of those men who from Cimabuë to Masaccio laboured with such whole-hearted devotion, should be both modest and precise. One must regard them first in the studio, and then in the workshop, where they lived like artisans. It is by studying them at their work that one comes to appreciate their simplicity and their genius. They were rough and ignorant. They had read little and seen little. The hills around Florence enclosed their visual and mental horizon. They knew nothing beyond their own town, the Bible and a few fragments of ancient sculpture, tenderly studied and cherished."

"You are quite right," said Professor Arrighi. "All they cared about was to use the best process. Their minds were entirely occupied in preparing glaze and mixing colours. He who first thought of pasting linen over a panel in order that the painting might not crack with the wood, was heralded as a man of genius. Every master had his own recipes and formulæ, which he guarded in strict secrecy."

"Happy days," resumed Dechartre, "when no one dreamed of that originality to which to-day we so eagerly aspire. The apprentice was content to follow his master. His sole ambition was to resemble him, and it was quite involuntarily that he appeared different from the others. They worked not to win fame, but to earn a livelihood."

"They were right," said Choulette; "there is nothing better than to work for a livelihood."

"To desire that their names should be handed

down to posterity," continued Dechartre, "never occurred to them. Knowing nothing of the past, they did not think of the future, and their dreams were confined to the present. On doing good they concentrated all the force of a strong will. And, being simple, they did not go far wrong; they beheld truths which our intelligence hides from us."

Meanwhile Choulette was beginning to tell Madame Marmet of a call he had paid that day on the French royal princess, to whom the Marchioness of Rieu had given him a letter of introduction. He took a delight in insinuating that he, a Bohemian, had been received by a royal princess, who would not have seen either Miss Bell or the Countess Martin, and whom Prince Albertinelli boasted of having met at some public reception.

"She practices the most austere piety," said the Prince.

"Her nobility combined with simplicity is admirable," said Choulette. "Surrounded by the gentlemen and ladies of her suite, she observes the strictest etiquette, and makes a penance of her high rank. Every morning she washes the church floor. It is a village church, the floor of which is often overrun by fowls, while the priest is playing at cards with the verger."

And Choulette, leaning over the table, imitated with his serviette the princess at her work. Then raising his hand, he said gravely:

"After a fitting time, spent in waiting in a long series of ante-chambers, I was admitted to kiss her hand."

And he was silent.

Madame Martin eagerly curious, asked:

"Well, what did this charmingly simple and noble princess say to you?"

"She asked me: 'Have you been to Florence? I hear that some very fine shops have recently been opened there, and that at night they are brilliantly lighted.' She remarked further: 'We have a very good chemist here. No Austrian chemist could be better. Six weeks ago he put a plaster on my leg which has not come off yet.' Such were the words that Marie Thérèse deigned to address to me. O simple greatness! O Christian Virtue! O daughter of St. Louis! O marvellous echo of thy voice, holy Elizabeth of Hungary!"

Madame Martin smiled. She thought Choulette must be joking. But he insisted that he was serious. Miss Bell reproached her friend. The French, she said, are always too ready to think people are not in earnest.

Then they resumed the discussion of those artistic ideas which in that country are always in the air.

"For my part," said Countess Martin, "I am not learned enough to admire Giotto and his school. What strikes me most in the fifteenth century is the sensuality of that so-called Christian art. The only piety and purity is to be found in the figures of Fra Angelico, and they too appeal to the senses as well as to the soul. The rest, virgins and angels, are voluptuous, caressing, and even perverse. What religious idea do they express, those royal magi as beautiful as women and that St. Sebastian, brilliant in his youthfulness, like the suffering Bacchus of Christianity?"

Dechartre replied that he agreed with her and that they must both be right, since Savonarola was of their opinion. Failing to discover piety in any

work of art, he had condemned them all to be burnt.

"In the days of that superb Manfred, who was half a Mussulman, men, said to be followers of Epicurus, tried to argue against the existence of God. The handsome Guido Cavalcanti despised those ignorant persons who believed in the immortality of the soul. He was represented as having said that 'The death of a man is like that of a beast.' Later when the beauty of antiquity rose from the tomb, the Christian sky was overclouded. The painters who worked in churches and monasteries were neither chaste nor devout. Perugino was an atheist and did not deny it."

"Yes," retorted Miss Bell, "but he was said to have a hard heart into which celestial truth could not penetrate. He was bitter and avaricious, wrapped up in material concerns. He thought of nothing but buying houses."

Professor Arrighi defended Pietro Vannucci of Perugia.

"He was an honest man," he said. "And the prior of the Gesuati at Florence was wrong in mistrusting him. This monk practiced the art of making ultra-marine blue by pounding lapis-lazuli to a powder. The ultra-marine was worth its weight in gold, and the prior, who knew a secret way of preparing it, considered his more precious than rubies and sapphires. He asked Pietro to decorate the two cloisters of his monastery, and he expected wonders, less from the skill of the master than from the beauty of the sky-blue ultra-marine. While the artist was painting the story of Jesus Christ on the cloister walls, the prior stayed by his side, holding the precious powder in a little bag, of which he never let go. Under the old man's eye, Pietro took

from it and dipped his brush covered with paint into a cup of water, before using it on the plaster of the wall. In this manner he used a great quantity of powder. And the good Father, seeing the contents of his bag rapidly growing less and less, groaned: 'Jesus, what a lot of ultra-marine it takes to cover this white-wash!'

"When the frescoes were finished, and Perugino had received from the prior the price agreed upon, he put into his hand a packet of blue powder. 'This is yours, Father,' he said; 'your ultra-marine, which I took on my brush, descended to the bottom of my cup, from which I abstracted it every day. I give it back to you. Now learn to trust good men.' "

"Oh!" said Thérèse, "there is nothing extraordinary in Perugino's having been both avaricious and honest. It is not always self-seeking persons who are the most unscrupulous. There are many who are honest and avaricious."

"Of course, darling!" said Miss Bell. "The avaricious will owe no man anything, while the prodigal is quite content to have debts. He thinks little of the money he possesses, and still less of what he owes. I never said that Pietro Vannucci of Perugia was a dishonest man. I said that he had a hard heart, and that he bought many houses. I am very glad to hear that he gave back the ultra-marine to the prior of the Gesuati."

"As your Pietro was rich," said Choulette, "it was his duty to restore the ultra-marine. It is incumbent upon the rich to be honest, but not upon the poor."

At this moment the butler was offering Choulette a silver basin; and the poet held out his hands to receive the scented water poured from the ewer. It

was a jug of chased silver and a basin with a false bottom, which, according to an ancient custom, Miss Bell had passed round to her guests at the end of a meal.

"I wash my hands," he said, "of the harm that Madame Martin does or may do by her words or in any other manner."

And he rose, furious, and followed Miss Bell, who left the table on the arm of Professor Arrighi.

In the drawing-room, while coffee was being served, she said:

"Monsieur Choulette, why must you be ever condemning us to the barbaric sadness of equality? The flute of Daphnis would not produce such sweet music if it were made of seven reeds of equal length. You would destroy those fine harmonies of master and servant, aristocrat and artisan. Oh! Monsieur Choulette, you are a barbarian. You have pity upon the poor, but you have no pity for the divine beauty you are driving from the world. You are driving her away, Monsieur Choulette; she is naked and in tears, you turn from her. Be assured, she will cease to dwell upon the earth when mankind becomes weak, puny, and ignorant. To banish from society the grouping of men of various ranks, from the humble to the great, is to be the enemy of rich and poor alike; it is to be the enemy of the whole human race."

"The enemies of humanity!" replied Choulette, dropping a knob of sugar into his coffee, "by that name did the hard-hearted Roman call the Christians who preached to him of love."

Meanwhile Dechartre, sitting by Madame Martin, was questioning her concerning her artistic tastes, supporting, directing, animating her admira-

tion, stimulating it sometimes with an affectionate abruptness, desiring that she should see all that he had seen, and love all that he had loved.

He wanted her to go into the garden in the delicate dawn of spring. In his mind's eye he saw her on the grand terraces; already he beheld the sunlight, playing on her neck and in her hair, and the bay-trees casting a shadow over her eyes. It seemed to him now that the earth and sky of Florence existed only as a background for this woman.

He congratulated her on the simplicity of her dress, on the lines of her figure and her grace, on the charming ease of her every movement. He liked, he said, those supple, graceful, flowing gowns that one sees so seldom and never forgets.

She had received many compliments, but never any that had given her greater pleasure. She knew that she dressed well, with a pronounced but unerring taste. But no man, except her father, had ever given her the praise of a connoisseur. She had believed men capable of appreciating the general effect of dress without understanding its minute details. Some, who were said to understand *chiffons,* disgusted her by an effeminate air and doubtful taste. She resigned herself to seeing her dress appreciated only by women, whose judgment was warped by petty malice and envy. The masculine artistic admiration of Dechartre surprised and pleased her. She received his praise with delight, and never thought of considering it too familiar and almost indiscreet.

"Then you take an interest in dress, Monsieur Dechartre?"

No, he seldom looked at it. There are so few well-dressed women, even now when they dress as

well and perhaps better than ever before. It gave him no pleasure to look at walking bundles. But to a woman whose figure presented good lines and who walked rhythmically he felt grateful.

He continued in a slightly higher voice:

"I can never think of a woman carefully adorning herself every day, without being reminded of the lesson she teaches us artists. It is for so short a time that she dresses and arranges her hair; but her labour is not wasted. Like her, we ought to adorn life without thinking of the future. To paint, to carve, to write for posterity is mere empty pride."

"Monsieur Dechartre," asked Prince Albertinelli, "how do you think a mauve gown with silver flowers would become Miss Bell?"

"As for me," said Choulette, "I am so little concerned with any earthly future that I have written my finest poems on cigarette papers. They perish easily and my verses retain only a kind of metaphysical existence."

He piqued himself on this air of indifference towards his own compositions. In reality he had never lost a single line of his writings. Dechartre was more sincere. He did not desire posthumous fame. Miss Bell blamed him for it.

"Life to be full and great must contain the past and the future, Monsieur Dechartre. We must produce our poetry and our works of art in memory of those who are dead and looking forward to those who will follow us. Thus we partake of what was, what is, and what will be. You do not wish to be immortal, Monsieur Dechartre. Beware lest God grant your desire."

He replied:

"It is enough for me to live for the moment."

And he took his leave, promising to return on the morrow to take Madame Martin to the Brancacci Chapel.

An hour later Thérèse was lying in a room, furnished in æsthetic style, hung with tapestry, on which lemon-trees, bearing golden fruit of immense size, formed a kind of fairy forest. Her head was on the pillow and over it she had thrown her beautiful bare arm. She was dreaming in the lamplight. Passing confusedly before her she beheld visions of her new life: Vivian Bell and her bells; those religious pictures, in which slight shadowy Pre-Raphaelite figures, ladies and cavaliers, appeared isolated, indifferent, and rather sad, but all the more human through their charming languor; the evening at the Fiesole villa, Prince Albertinelli, Professor Arrighi, Choulette, the brisk conversation, the curious play of ideas, and Dechartre with young eyes but rather worn countenance, to which his swarthy skin and pointed beard gave an almost Eastern air.

She realised that he possessed a delightful imagination, a mind richer than any she had known, and a charm she could no longer resist. She had known from the first that he was endowed with the gift of pleasing. She now knew that he wished to please. This idea filled her with delight; she shut her eyes as if to retain it. Then suddenly she shuddered.

In the depths of her inner consciousness she felt a dull blow and a smarting pain. She had a sudden vision of her lover in the wood, his gun under his arm. He was walking with his firm regular step down a long path. She could not see his face and it troubled her. She no longer bore him any ill-will. She was not vexed with him now. At present she was vexed with herself. And Robert went straight

on never turning his head, on and on, till he became a black spot in the desolate wood. She felt that she had been abrupt, hard, and capricious to leave him without saying good-bye, even without writing a letter. He was her lover, her one lover. She had never had another. "I should not like him to be unhappy through me," she thought.

Gradually she was reassured. It was true that he loved her; but he was not very sensitive, and fortunately not very quick to grow anxious and uneasy. "He is hunting. He is happy. He is with his Aunt de Lannoix, whom he admires. . . ." She forgot her anxiety and gave herself up to the enchanting deep-seated gaiety of Florence. At the Uffizi there was a picture she had not cared for and which Dechartre admired. It was the detached head of Medusa, a work into which, the sculptor said, Leonardo had put all his wonderful power of detail and delicate sense of the deepest tragedy. Disappointed with herself for not having thoroughly appreciated it at first, she wanted to see it again.

She put out her lamp and fell asleep.

Towards morning she dreamt she met Robert le Ménil in an empty church, that he was wrapped in a fur coat which was unfamiliar to her. He was waiting for her, but they were separated by a crowd of priests and worshippers, who had suddenly appeared. She did not know what became of him. She had not been able to see his face and that alarmed her. Awake, she heard at her open window a little sad monotonous cry, and, in the milky dawn, she saw a swallow flit by. Then, without cause and without reason, she wept. With the sorrow of a child she shed tears over herself.

XI

SHE rose early and took delight in dressing carefully with an art delicately disguised. Her dressing-room was one of Vivian Bell's æsthetic fancies. With its roughly glazed pottery, its copper pitchers and tiled floor, it resembled a kitchen, but a fairy's kitchen. It was so mediæval and so uncommon that Countess Martin had no difficulty in imagining herself a fairy princess. While her maid was doing her hair she heard Dechartre and Choulette talking underneath her window. She undid Pauline's work and boldly displayed the fine line of the nape of her neck. Then, having taken a last look at herself in the mirror, she went down into the garden.

In the garden, shaded by yew trees like some peaceful cemetery, Dechartre was looking down on Florence and repeating lines from Dante:

"And when our soul, more alien from the sphere."*

Near him Choulette, sitting on the balustrade, his legs hanging and his nose in his beard, was carving the face of Poverty on his wanderer's staff.

And Dechartre repeated the lines of the poem:

"And when our soul, more alien from the sphere
Of flesh, and less to rush of hot thoughts given,
As half-divine looks forth in visions clear";

* "Purgatory," canto ix. 16. Plumptre's Translation.—W. S.

In her maize-coloured gown, shaded by her parasol, she came along the trim box hedge. The soft winter sun clothed her in a pale golden light.

Dechartre joyfully bade her good morning.

She said:

"You are reciting lines I do not know. Metastasio is the only Italian poet with whose works I am familiar. The professor who taught me Italian adored Metastasio and did not care for any one else. When does the mind become divine in its visions?"

"At the break of day, or it may be also in the dawn of faith or of love."

Choulette did not think the poet meant morning dreams. They leave so vivid and sometimes so painful an impression on awaking, and they are not dissociated from the body. But Dechartre had only quoted those lines in his rapture at the golden dawn which he had seen that morning on the fair hills. He had long wondered about the visions that come to us in the night, and he had arrived at the conclusion that they proceed not from what has most occupied our minds during the day, but from thoughts from which we have turned away.

Then Thérèse recalled her dream that morning of the hunter on the long path leading into the deep wood.

"Yes," said Dechartre, "at night we see the sad vestiges of what we have neglected during the day. A dream is often the revenge of things neglected or of persons deserted; hence its unexpectedness and sometimes its sadness."

For a moment she remained silent and thoughtful, and then she said:

"Perhaps it is true."

Then, turning eagerly to Choulette, she asked him if he had finished carving the figure of Poverty on the handle of his walking-stick. But Poverty had become a Pietà, and Choulette was pleased to call her the Virgin. He had even composed a quatrain to be written on a scroll beneath; the quatrain was both didactic and moral. His style was henceforth to be that of the Ten Commandments translated into French verse. The four lines were good and simple. He consented to repeat them:

> Prone 'neath His Cross, will ye
> Not weep, love, hope with me?
> Beneath that Tree of Grace
> Refuge of all our race? *

As on the day of her arrival, Thérèse leant against the balustrade and looked far into the distance, beyond the ocean of light, to where rose the summits of Vallombrosa, almost as liquid as the clouds.

Dechartre was watching her. It seemed to him as if he saw her for the first time, such new charm did he discover on her delicate face, which life and thought had lined, but had not robbed of their youthful grace and freshness. The light that she loved enhanced her beauty. And she was beautiful indeed, bathed in that soft Florentine light which glorifies beautiful forms and fosters noble thoughts. There was a slight colour on her finely moulded cheeks. There was a laugh in her grey-blue eyes; and when she spoke she displayed the brilliant white-

> * "Je pleure au pied de la Croix.
> Avec moi pleure, aime et crois,
> Sous cet arbre salutaire
> Qui doit ombrager la terre."

ness of her teeth. In a glance he appreciated all the graceful details of her supple figure. With one hand she held her parasol, with the other ungloved she was toying with some violets. Dechartre had a passion for beautiful hands. For him a hand had a character, a soul, a physiognomy as pronounced as a countenance. Thérèse's hands delighted him. They were at once sensual and spiritual. It seemed to him that they were bare from sheer voluptuousness. He adored their tapering fingers, their pink nails, their slender skin, marked with graceful lines, and rising gently and harmoniously towards the knuckles. He gazed entranced until she closed them on the handle of her parasol. Then, slightly behind her, he looked again. Her bust, her arms, graceful and correct in line, her well-developed hips, her fine ankles, her whole figure, in the beautiful form of a living amphora, pleased him.

"That black spot down there is the Boboli gardens, isn't it, Monsieur Dechartre? I saw them three years ago. There were hardly any flowers then; and yet I loved them with their great dark trees."

That she should speak, that she should think, almost astonished him. The clear tones of that voice came upon him as if he had never heard them before.

He answered in the first words that occurred to him, and smiled a forced smile, attempting to hide the stirrings of passion. He was awkward and confused. She did not seem to notice it. That deep, husky, faltering voice unconsciously caressed her. She, like him, uttered commonplaces:

"What a fine view! What a lovely day."

XII

IN the morning, with her head upon a pillow embroidered with a coat of arms in the form of a bell, Thérèse was meditating on what she had seen on the previous day: those finely painted Virgins surrounded by angels, those countless children, painted or in sculpture, all beautiful, all happy, singing simply through the town their alleluias of grace and beauty. In the famous Brancacci Chapel, before those frescoes pale and gleaming like a divine dawn, he had talked of Masaccio, in such glowing words that she seemed to see the youth, master of masters, with half open mouth and dark blue eyes, dying in an ecstasy. And she was filled with adoration for the marvels of that dawn more delightful even than the noon-day. And for her Dechartre was the soul of all these magnificent forms, the vivifying spirit of all these good things. Through him and in him she understood life and art. The sights of the world interested her only so far as they interested him.

How had this sympathy grown up between them? She did not exactly know. At first, when Paul Vence wished to introduce him to her, she had no wish to know him, no presentiment that she would like him. She recalled the beautiful bronzes and

fine wax figures signed with his name that she had noticed in the Salon of the Champ-de-Mars and at Durand-Ruel's. But she never imagined that he himself would be interesting or more attractive than so many artists and amateurs whom she invited to her luncheon parties. On their first meeting he pleased her; and she made up her mind to attract him and see him often. The evening that he dined at her house she perceived that her liking for him was of an intellectual kind which flattered her own *amour propre*. But soon afterwards he irritated and vexed her by appearing too self-centred, too much occupied with himself and too little with her. She would have liked to agitate him. In this dissatisfied mood, and troubled by other things, feeling herself alone in the world, she had met him one evening, in front of the Museum of Religions, and he had talked of Ravenna and the empress in her tomb, on her golden chair. In the shades of night she had thought him charming, with his soft voice, and his pleasing glance, but too reserved and distant. He made her feel ill at ease, and, at that moment, walking along the terrace, by the box hedge, she could not decide whether she wanted to see him always or never again.

Since she had met him at Florence her one delight was to feel him near her and hear him talk. He made her life attractive by introducing into it variety, novelty, and colour. He initiated her into the delicate delicious melancholy of thought. He called into activity a taste for pleasures hitherto undreamed of. Now she was quite decided to retain him. But how? She foresaw difficulties; her lucid mind and her intense feeling called them all up before her. For a moment she tried to

deceive herself; she argued that a dreamer, an enthusiast, wrapped up in the study of art, he had perhaps no violent passion for women, and would remain assiduous without becoming exacting. But immediately, shaking her beautiful head half lost in the ripples of her dark hair, she cast this idea from her. If Dechartre were not a lover then he lost all his charm for her. She dared not think of the future. She must live in the present; happy, but anxious and blindfold.

She was meditating thus in the shadow broken by arrows of light, when Pauline brought her letters with her morning tea. She recognised Le Ménil's writing on an envelope, stamped with the name of his club in the Rue Royale. She had expected to receive this letter, and now, as in her childhood when the infallible clock struck the hour of her music-lesson, she was merely surprised that what was bound to come had actually happened.

Robert's letter was full of just reproaches. Why had she gone away without telling him, without even leaving a line of farewell? Since his return to Paris, every morning he had expected the letter which had not arrived. How different from last year, when, two or three times a week, on awaking, he used to find such nice letters, so well expressed that he had regretted not being able to publish them. He had become very anxious and had called at her house.

"I was thunderstruck to hear of your departure. Your husband received me. He told me, that, following his advice, you had gone to pass the last weeks of winter at Miss Bell's, at Florence. For some time he had noticed you growing pale and

thin. He had thought that a change of air would do you good. You had not wanted to go; but, as you became less and less well, he had succeeded in persuading you.

"I had not noticed that you were growing thin. On the contrary I thought you looking extremely well. Besides Florence is not a winter resort. I can't understand your departure; it troubles me very much. Write at once, I pray you, and reassure me. . . .

"I leave you to imagine how pleasant it is for me to hear of your movements from your husband and to receive his confidences! He is distressed by your absence and regrets that his public duties keep him in Paris. At the club I hear there is a chance of his entering the Government. I am astonished, for it is not usual for a leader of society to become a Minister."

Then he told her of his hunting. He had brought her three fox's skins, one very fine: the coat of a brave beast, he had dragged from his den, that had turned and bitten him in the hand. "After all," he said, "the creature was standing on his rights."

At Paris he was worried. A young cousin was standing for election to the club. He was afraid that he would be blackballed. But his candidature was already announced. And at this point he dared not advise him to withdraw; it would be assuming too great a responsibility. On the other hand, a defeat would be extremely disagreeable. He ended his letter by entreating her to write and to return soon.

Having read the letter, she tore it up slowly, threw it in the fire, and sadly, gloomily, and thoughtfully watched it burn.

Doubtless he was right. He said what he might be expected to say; he complained as he had a right to complain. How should she reply to him? Should she prolong the quarrel and continue to sulk? But it was no longer a question of sulking. The subject of their quarrel was so indifferent to her that she must needs think before she could remember it. Oh, no, she had lost all desire to vex him. On the contrary she felt kindly towards him. The realisation that he loved her trustfully and with an undisturbed tranquillity of mind saddened and alarmed her. He had not changed. He was the same as before. But she was no longer the same. They were separated now by things imperceptible and yet as strong as the vivifying or deadening effects of the atmosphere. When her maid came to dress her she had not yet begun to write the reply.

She was thinking anxiously: "He trusts me. His mind is at rest." That was what irritated her most. Simple persons mistrustful neither of themselves nor of other people always irritated her.

When she went down into the drawing-room of bells, she found Vivian Bell there writing; she said to her:

"Darling, would you like to know what I was doing while I was waiting for you? Nothing and yet everything. I was writing verses. Oh! darling, poetry must be the natural flowering of the soul."

Thérèse kissed Miss Bell, and, with her head on her friend's shoulder, she said:

"May I look?"

"Oh! yes, look, darling. They are verses

written in the style of the popular songs of your country."

And Thérèse read:

> The milk-white stone she threw
> Pierced the lake-waters blue,
> And as its surface grew
> Still, took a darker hue.
> Then she, the stone that threw,
> Both shame and dolour knew
> The load from her heart to view
> The treacherous waters through.*

"The lines are figurative, Vivian; explain them to me."

"Why should I explain, why? A poetical figure may have many meanings. The one that you put into it will be the true meaning for you. But one is very clear, my love: that you must not lightly part with your heart's treasure."

The carriage was ready. They started as they had appointed to visit the Albertinelli Gallery, in the Via del Moro. The Prince expected them and Dechartre was to meet them at the Palace. On the way, as the carriage glided over the broad high-road, Vivian Bell talked in short, disjointed sentences uttered in a sing-song voice. Thus she gave expression to the gaiety of a temperament rare and precious. As they went down among the pink and white houses, with storied gardens, adorned with statues and fountains, she pointed out to her

> * Elle jeta la pierre blanche
> A l'eau du lac bleu.
> La pierre dans l'onde tranquille
> Sombra peu à peu.
> Alors la jeteuse de pierres
> Eut honte et douleur
> D'avoir mis dans le lac perfide
> Le poids de son cœur.

friend, the villa half hidden among the pine-trees, to which the ladies and gentlemen of the *Decameron* fled from the plague, which was ravaging Florence, and amused themselves by telling stories, gallant, facetious, or tragic. Then she disclosed a brilliant idea which had occurred to her the day before.

"You, darling, had gone to the Carmine with M. Dechartre. You had left Madame Marmet at Fiesole. She is a nice old lady of moderate opinions and excellent manners. She is full of stories of distinguished Parisians. And when she tells them she is like my cook, Pampaloni, when he sends up poached eggs: he does not salt them, but he puts the salt-cellar by the side of the dish. Madame Marmet is a sweet-tongued old lady. But the salt is there—in her eyes. It is Pampaloni's dish, my love; and every one seasons it to his taste. Oh! I am very fond of Madame Marmet. Yesterday, after you had gone, I found her sad and lonely in a corner of the drawing-room. She was thinking of her husband, and her thoughts were sad. I said to her: 'Would you like me to join you in your meditations on your husband? I shall be very pleased to do so. I have heard that he was a scholar and a member of the Paris Royal Society. Tell me about him.' She replied that he was devoted to the Etruscans and had consecrated his whole life to them. And, at once, darling, I venerated the memory of this Monsieur Marmet who lived for the Etruscans. And then a brilliant idea occurred to me. I said to Madame Marmet: 'At Fiesole, in the Palazzo Pretorio, we have a modest little Etruscan museum. Come with me and see it. Will you?' She replied that that was what she wanted to see more than anything

in Italy. We went together to the Pretorio Palace; and we saw a lioness with her numerous young and little grotesque bronze men, either very fat or very thin. The Etruscans were a people who took their pleasures sadly. They used to make caricatures in brass. But these grotesque figures, some with protruding stomachs, others with an astonished air, displaying bare bones, Madame Marmet regarded with sorrowful admiration. She considered them as . . . . there is an expressive French word I am trying to find . . . . as the monuments and trophies of M. Marmet."

Madame Martin smiled. But she was depressed. The sky appeared to her dull, the streets ugly, the passers-by vulgar.

"Oh! darling, the Prince will be delighted to welcome you to his palace."

"I don't think so."

"But why, darling, why?"

"Because he does not like me."

Vivian Bell declared that on the contrary the Prince greatly admired Countess Martin.

The carriage stopped before the Albertinelli Palace. On the dark Gothic façade were bronze rings which in former days, on festive nights, were used to hold pine torches. At Florence these rings indicate the residences of the most illustrious families. They imparted to the palace an aggressively arrogant air. Inside it appeared empty, unused, and neglected. The Prince met them and conducted them, through unfurnished reception rooms, to the gallery. He apologised for showing them pictures which were not very pleasing. The collection had been made by Cardinal Giulio Albertinelli at the time of the vogue of Guido and Carracci. His

ancestor had delighted in collecting the works of the Bolognese school. But he would show Madame Martin a few pictures which had found favour with Miss Bell; among others a Mantegna.

At a glance Countess Martin saw that the pictures were commonplace and of doubtful authenticity. She was bored at once by the numerous examples of Parrocel, all with figures in armour mounted on white horses amid darkness made visible by gleams of lurid light.

A footman brought in a card. The Prince read aloud the name of Jacques Dechartre. Just at that moment he had his back towards his two visitors. His countenance assumed that expression of malicious vexation which is to be seen on the statues of Roman emperors. Dechartre was on the landing of the state stair-case.

The Prince advanced to meet him with a languishing smile. He was no longer Nero, but Antinous.

"Yesterday I myself invited M. Dechartre to come to the Albertinelli Palace," said Miss Bell to the Prince. "I knew I should give you pleasure. He wanted to see your pictures."

And it was true that Dechartre had wished to come in order to meet Madame Martin. Now all four, they were wandering past the Guidos and Albanis.

Miss Bell was chirping to the Prince pretty things about the old men and virgins whose mantles were being blown by a motionless tempest. Dechartre, pale and nervous, came near to Thérèse and whispered:

"This gallery is the rubbish-heap on which the picture-dealers of the whole world have deposited the refuse of their stock. And here the Prince

succeeds in selling what the Jews have failed to dispose of."

He took her to a Holy Family, displayed on an easel draped in green velvet and bearing in the margin the name of Michael Angelo.

"I have seen that Holy Family in picture shops at London, Bâle, and Paris. As the dealers have not been able to get for it the twenty-five louis it is worth, they have commissioned the last of the Albertinelli to sell it for fifty thousand francs."

The Prince, seeing them whispering together, and guessing what they were saying, approached very graciously.

"A replica of this picture has been offered for sale everywhere. I don't maintain that this is an original. But it has always been in my family, and old inventories attribute it to Michael Angelo. That's all I can say."

The Prince turned to Miss Bell, who was looking for Primitives.

Dechartre was ill at ease. Since yesterday he had been thinking of Thérèse. He had dreamed of her all night and conjured up her image. Now he found her delightful, but delightful in a different way, and even more desirable than she had appeared to him in the visions of the night; her materialised form more irresistibly attractive, her soul more mysterious and inscrutable. She was sad; she appeared to him cold and absent-minded. He told himself that he was nothing to her, that he was becoming importunate and ridiculous. He grew gloomy and irritable. He murmured bitterly in her ear:

"I had thought better of it. I didn't want to come. Then why am I here?"

She understood immediately what he meant, that

he feared her now, and so was impatient, shy and awkward. She liked him thus, and was grateful to him for the agitation and desire, with which she saw she inspired him.

Her heart beat quickly. But, pretending to understand that he was vexed at having taken the trouble to come and see bad pictures, she replied that the gallery was indeed very uninteresting.

Already terrified at the idea of displeasing her, he was reassured and really believed that, absent and indifferent, she had not remarked either the tone or the significance of the words that had escaped from him.

"Very uninteresting," he repeated.

The Prince, who was entertaining his two visitors to lunch, invited their friend also. Dechartre excused himself. He was going out, when, in the great drawing-room empty of everything but consoles on which were piled confectioners' boxes, he found himself alone with Madame Martin. He had thought of avoiding her, now his one idea was when he should see her again. He reminded her that on the morrow she was to visit the Bargello.

"You were kind enough to say I might come with you."

She asked him if he had not found her dull and heavy that day.

Oh! no, but he had thought her rather sad.

"Alas!" he added, "your sadness, your joys, I have not even the right to know them."

She turned round upon him quickly, almost severely, saying:

"You surely don't think I am going to make you my confidant?"

And she left him abruptly.

XIII

FTER dinner, in the drawing-room of bells, under the lamps, the deep shades of which permitted but a half light to reach the long-handed Virgins of Sienna, kind Madame Marmet was warming herself at the stove with a white cat on her knee. The evening was cold. Madame Martin was smiling happily, in spite of fatigue, and gazing mentally at the purple hill-tops in the clear atmosphere and at the ancient oaks twisting their huge branches across the road. With Miss Bell, Dechartre, and Madame Marmet she had been to the Certosa of Ema. And now, in the intoxication of the day's memories, she forgot the cares of two days ago—importunate letters, reproaches from a distance; and it seemed to her as if there were nothing in the world but carved and painted cloisters, with a well in the grass-grown court, red roofed villages, and roads, where, soothed by flattering words, she had watched the dawn of spring. Dechartre had just roughly modelled a little Beatrice in wax for Miss Bell. Vivian was painting angels. Lazily leaning over her, in an effeminate pose, Prince Albertinelli was stroking his beard and casting languishing glances around him.

Replying to a remark of Vivian Bell's on marriage and love:

"A woman must choose," he said. "With a man whom women like she is never at rest. With a man whom women do not like, she is never happy."

"Darling," asked Miss Bell, "which lot would you choose for a very dear friend?"

"Vivian, I should wish my friend to be happy, I should wish her also to be free from anxiety. And she would wish to be so and yet to hate treachery, humiliating suspicion, and mean mistrust."

"But, darling, since the Prince said that a woman could not at once enjoy happiness and peace of mind, say which you would choose for your friend."

"One does not choose, Vivian, one does not choose. Don't make me say what I think of marriage."

At this moment Choulette appeared, with the magnificent air of one of those beggars who honour the gates of little towns. He had just been playing cards with peasants in a Fiesole wine-shop.

"Here is M. Choulette," said Miss Bell. "He will tell us what to think of marriage. I am ready to listen to him as to an oracle. He does not see what we see, and he sees what we do not see. Monsieur Choulette, what do you think of marriage?"

He sat down and raised a Socratic finger.

"Do you speak, Mademoiselle, of the solemn union between man and woman? In this sense marriage is a sacrament. Hence it is nearly always sacrilege. As for civil marriage, that is a mere formality. The importance attached to it by present day society is a folly which would have appeared laughable to women of the old *régime*. We owe

this prejudice with many others to that *bourgeois* movement, to the rise of financiers and lawyers, which is termed the Revolution and which seems admirable to those who profit by it. It is the fruitful mother of all foolishness. Every day for a century she has been bringing forth new absurdities. Civil marriage is nothing but one of many registrations, instituted by the state in order that it may be informed concerning the condition of its citizens: for in a civilised state every one must have his label. And of what value are all these labels in the eyes of the Son of God? Morally, this entry in a register is not even enough to induce a woman to take a lover. Who would scruple to break an oath sworn before a mayor? In order to taste the true joys of adultery one must be pious."

"But, sir," said Thérèse, "we have been married at church."

Then in a tone of deep sincerity, she added:

"I cannot understand how any man or woman, having attained to years of discretion, can commit the folly of marriage."

The Prince looked at her suspiciously. He was quick witted, but he was incapable of believing that any one ever spoke disinterestedly, merely to express general ideas and without some definite object. He imagined that Countess Martin had discovered his scheme and determined to thwart it. And, as already he was thinking of defending himself and taking his revenge, he ogled her and addressed her with affectionate gallantry.

"You, Madame, display the pride of all beautiful and intelligent Frenchwomen, who chafe beneath the yoke. Frenchwomen love liberty, and not one of them is worthier of it than you. I myself have

lived a little in France. I have known and admired the fashionable society of Paris in drawing-rooms, at dinner tables, in public assemblies, and sports. But among our mountains, beneath our olive-trees, we relapse into rusticity. We return to our country manners, and marriage seems to us a sweet romantic idyll."

Vivian Bell examined the model which Dechartre had left on the table.

"Oh! that is the living image of Beatrice, I am sure. And do you know, Monsieur Dechartre, there are wicked men who say that Beatrice never existed?"

Choulette declared that he was one of those wicked men. He did not believe that Beatrice existed any more than those other ladies in whose personalities the old love poets expressed some ridiculously subtle scholastic idea.

Intolerant of any praise not bestowed on himself, jealous of Dante, and of the whole universe, and also a keen man of letters, he thought he had discovered a joint in the armour, and struck:

"I suspect," he said, "that the young sister of the angels never lived except in the dry imagination of the illustrious poet. Even there she appears as a pure allegory, or rather a mathematical calculation or an astrological exercise. Dante, who between ourselves was a good doctor of Bologna, and had several bees in his poked bonnet, believed in the virtue of numbers. This passionate geometrician dreamt in figures, and his Beatrice is the flower of his arithmetic. That's all!"

And he lit his pipe.

Vivian Bell protested:

"Oh! don't talk like that, Monsieur Choulette.

You hurt me. If our friend M. Gebhart heard you, he would be very angry. To punish you, Prince Albertinelli shall read you the canto in which Beatrice explains the spots in the moon. Take the *Divina Commedia,* Eusebio. It is that white book on the table. Open it and read."

During the reading under the lamp, Dechartre, sitting on the sofa near Countess Martin, spoke enthusiastically of Dante in whispers, calling him the greatest sculptor among poets. He reminded Thérèse of the picture they had seen together two days ago, at Santa Maria, on the Servites' door, a half-effaced fresco, in which it was difficult to distinguish the poet with his laurel-wreathed hood, Florence, and the seven circles. Enough of it remained however to enrapture the artist. But she had not been able to distinguish anything; it had not appealed to her. And then she confessed that Dante was too gloomy and attracted her but little. Dechartre, who had grown accustomed to her sharing all his poetical and artistic ideas, felt surprised and vexed. He said aloud:

"There are things both great and strong that you do not realise."

Miss Bell, raising her head, asked what were those things that darling did not realise; and, when she heard that one was the genius of Dante, she exclaimed with simulated wrath:

"Oh, don't you honour the father, the master worthy of all praise, the River God? I don't like you any more, darling. I detest you."

And, as a reproach to Choulette and Countess Martin, she recalled the piety of that Florentine citizen who took from the altar the candles lit in honour of Jesus Christ and placed them before Dante's bust.

After this interruption the Prince had resumed his reading:

> "Within itself the ever-during pearl
> Received us;" *

Dechartre insisted on wishing to make Thérèse admire what she did not understand. For her sake certainly he would have sacrificed Dante and all the poets, with the rest of the universe. But by her side, in the ardour of his desire, beholding her tranquil, he was irritated by her smiling beauty. He felt bound to impose on her his ideas, his artistic passions, even his fancies and caprices. In a low voice and in quick argumentative words he remonstrated with her.

"How vehement you are," she said.

Then he whispered in her ear, in a passionate voice which he vainly sought to moderate:

"You must take my soul with me. It would give me no joy to win you with a soul that was not my own."

At these words there passed over Thérèse a little shudder of fear and joy.

* "Paradiso," Canto ii. Cary's Translation. W. S.

XIV

HE next day, on awaking, she told herself that she must answer Robert's letter. It was raining. Languidly she listened to the raindrops falling on the terrace. With thoughtful and delicate taste, Vivian Bell had had the table furnished with artistic writing materials: sheets of paper in imitation of the parchment of missals, and others pale violet glistening with silver; celluloid penholders, white and light, requiring to be used like brushes; and purple ink, turning on the page into an azure shot with gold. Such precious and unusual equipments irritated Thérèse, who considered them out of keeping with the simple direct letter she wanted to write. When she perceived that the name of "friend," by which she addressed Robert in the first line, cut a curious figure on the silvered paper, outlined in shades of dove colour and mother-of-pearl, she half smiled. She found the first sentences difficult. The rest she hurried over. She wrote at length of Vivian Bell and Prince Albertinelli, a little of Choulette, and said that she had met Dechartre, who was passing through Florence. She praised a few pictures in the museums, but without enthusiasm and merely to fill the pages. She knew that Robert did not understand pictures, that the only one he admired

was a little cuirassier by Detaille, bought at Goupil's. In her mind's eye she saw once more that little cuirassier, which he had proudly shown her one day, in his bedroom near the mirror, underneath his family portraits. Looked at from a distance it all seemed mean, wearisome, and sad. She ended her letter with a few kind friendly words which were sincere. She had really never before felt so calmly benignant towards her lover. In four pages she had said little and implied less. She had merely told him that she would stay another month at Florence, where the air was doing her good. Afterwards she wrote to her father, her husband, and Princess Seniavine. With her letters in her hand she went downstairs. In the hall she placed three of them on the silver salver intended for letters. Mistrusting Madame Marmet's curious eyes she put Le Ménil's letter in her pocket, intending to post it herself when out walking.

Almost immediately Dechartre arrived to go with the three friends into the town. While he was waiting for a moment in the hall he noticed the letters in the salver.

Without believing in the slightest in the reading of character by means of handwriting, he became aware of the form of the letters, which assumed a certain grace as if they were a kind of drawing. Because it was a memorial, a sort of relic of Thérèse, her writing charmed him, and he appreciated also its striking frankness and bold simplicity with an admiration entirely sensual. He looked at the addresses without reading them.

That morning they visited Santa Maria Novella, where Countess Martin had been already with Madame Marmet. But Miss Bell had reproached them with not having seen the beautiful Ginevra de'

Benci, in a fresco in the choir. "You must see that figure of the dawn in the fine morning light," said Vivian. While the poetess and Thérèse were talking together, Dechartre, attached to Madame Marmet, was listening patiently to anecdotes of academicians dining with fashionable ladies, and was sympathising with the good lady in her vain endeavours to procure a tulle veil. She could not find any to her liking in the Florence shops, and she longed for the Rue du Bac.

Coming out of the church they passed the booth of the cobbler whom Choulette had adopted as his master. The good man was patching a countryman's boots. The pot of basil was at his side, and the sparrow with the wooden leg chirped close by.

Madame Martin asked the old man if he were quite well, if he had enough work to do, and if he were happy. To all these questions he replied the charming Italian "Yes," the *Si* coming musically from his toothless mouth. She made him tell them his sparrow's story. One day the poor little creature had put his foot into the boiling wax.

"I made my little friend a wooden leg out of a match, and now he is able to perch on my shoulder as of old."

"He is a kind old man," said Miss Bell, "who teaches M. Choulette wisdom. At Athens there was a cobbler, named Simon, who wrote works on philosophy and was the friend of Socrates. I have always thought M. Choulette resembled Socrates."

Thérèse asked the shoemaker to tell them his name and his story. His name was Serafino Stoppini and he came from Stia. He was old. His life had been full of trouble.

He put back his spectacles on to his forehead,

revealing his blue kindly eyes, growing dim beneath their reddened lids:

"I had a wife and children, now I am alone. I have known things, which now I have forgotten."

Miss Bell and Madame Marmet had gone to buy the veil.

"His tools, a handful of nails, the tub in which he soaks his leather, and a pot of basil are all he has in the world," thought Thérèse, "and yet he is happy."

"This plant smells sweet, and soon it will flower," she said.

"If the poor little thing flowers, it will die," he replied.

When she went away, Thérèse left a coin on the table.

Dechartre was near her. Seriously, almost sternly, he said to her:

"You knew it?"

She looked at him and waited.

He concluded:

". . . . that I love you."

For a moment she continued to look at him silently with bright eyes and quivering lids. Then she bowed her head as a sign of affirmation. And, without his attempting to detain her, she went towards Miss Bell and Madame Marmet, who were waiting at the end of the street.

XV

N leaving Dechartre, Thérèse went to lunch with her friend and Madame Marmet at the house of an old Florentine lady, whom Victor-Emmanuel had loved when he was Duke of Savoy. For thirty years she had never once quitted her palace on the Arno, where painted and powdered, wearing a violet wig, she played upon the guitar in her great white halls. She received the highest society in Florence, and Miss Bell frequently went to see her. During lunch, this recluse of eighty-seven questioned Countess Martin concerning the fashionable Paris world, the life of which she followed in newspapers and conversation with a frivolity which was rendered august by its persistence. In her solitude she continued to cherish a respect and adoration for pleasure.

Coming out of the palazzo, in order to avoid the wind, which was blowing across the river, the keen *libeccio,* Miss Bell took her friends through the old narrow streets, lined with houses of dark stone suddenly opening on a broad space where a hill with three slender trees stands forth in the clear atmosphere. As they went, Vivian pointed out to her friend, on sordid façades from which red rags were hanging, some precious statue, a Virgin, a lily, a

St. Catherine beneath a scroll of leaves. They walked down the little streets of the ancient city as far as the church of Or San Michele, where it had been agreed that Dechartre should meet them.

Thérèse was thinking of him now with intense interest. Madame Marmet was bent on finding a veil; she had been encouraged to hope that there might be one on the Corso. Her errand reminded her of the absent-mindedness of M. Lagrange who, one day, when he was lecturing, took from his pocket a veil with gold beads and wiped his forehead with it, mistaking it for his handkerchief. His astonished hearers giggled. It was a veil belonging to his niece, Mademoiselle Jeanne Michot, who had confided it to his care when he had taken her to the theatre on the previous evening. And Madame Marmet explained how, finding it in his overcoat pocket, he had taken it with him, intending to give it back to his niece, and how, by mistake, he had unfolded it and waved it before his smiling audience.

The name of Lagrange reminded Thérèse of the comet predicted by the scholar, and she said to herself with a sad irony, that now was the time for it to come and end the world and relieve her from embarrassment. But, above the beautiful walls of the old church, she beheld the sky gleaming and cruelly blue, swept by the wind blowing in from the sea.

Miss Bell directed her attention to one of the bronze statues, which, in carved niches, adorn the façade of the church.

"Look, darling, how proud and young that St. George is. St. George used to be a girl's ideal

knight. You remember how Juliet cried when she saw Romeo: 'What a handsome St. George!' "*

But darling thought he looked conventional, commonplace, and obstinate. At that moment, she remembered the letter in her pocket.

"I think there is M. Dechartre," said kind Madame Marmet.

He had been looking for them in the church, near Orcagna's shrine. He ought to have remembered how irresistible Miss Bell always found Donatello's St. George. He also admired the famous figure. But the frankless conventional figure of St. Mark appealed to him more. They might see it in its niche on the left, near that little street, overspanned by a massive arched buttress, near the old House of the Wool-staplers.

As they were approaching the statue, Thérèse saw a letter-box in the wall of the narrow street at the end of which stood the saint. Meanwhile Dechartre, standing so as to have a good view of his St. Mark, was speaking of him as if he were an intimate friend.

"I always come to him before going anywhere else in Florence. Only once did I fail. But he will forgive me; he is an excellent man. He is not appreciated by the majority and attracts little attention. But I delight in his company. He is alive. I can understand why Donatello, after having created his soul, cried: 'Mark, why don't you speak?' "

Madame Marmet, tired of admiring St. Mark and feeling nipped by the *libeccio,* carried away Miss Bell to help her buy the veil in the Via dei Calzaioli.

They left "darling" and Dechartre alone to con-

*I have been unable to discover this reference in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet.*—W. S.

tinue their worship of St. Mark. They arranged to meet at the milliner's.

"I have always loved him," continued the sculptor, "because I recognise here more than in the St. George, the hand and soul of Donatello, who was all his life a poor and honest workman. And to-day I love him more intensely, because, in his venerable touching candour, he reminds me of the old cobbler of Santa Maria Novella, to whom you were talking so sweetly this morning."

"Ah!" she said. "I have forgotten his name. We and M. Choulette call him Quentin Matsys because he reminds us of the old men that artist painted."

As they turned the church corner to inspect the façade opposite the old Wool-staplers' House, bearing the heraldic lamb on its red-tiled gable, she found herself close to the letter-box, so covered with grime and rust that it looked as if the postman never cleared it. She slipped in her letter, under the ingenuous eyes of St. Mark.

Dechartre saw her and immediately felt pierced to the heart. He tried to talk, to laugh, but he could not forget the gloved hand posting the letter. He remembered having seen Thérèse's letters in the morning on the hall table. Why had she not put that one with the others? It was not difficult to guess.

He stood still, lost in thought, gazing vacantly. He tried to reassure himself: perhaps it was only an unimportant letter she wanted to hide from Madame Marmet's irritating curiosity.

"Monsieur Dechartre, it must be time for us to go and meet our friends at the milliner's on the Corso."

Perhaps she was writing to Madame Schmoll who had quarrelled with Madame Marmet. And immediately he realised the improbability of such suppositions.

It was quite clear. She had a lover. She was writing to him. Perhaps she was saying: "I have seen Dechartre to-day, the poor fellow is in love with me." But whatever she wrote, she had a lover. He had never dreamt of such a thing. The idea of her belonging to another caused him agony of soul and body. And the vision of that hand, that little hand posting the letter, remained before his eyes and seemed to burn them.

She could not imagine why he had suddenly become silent and gloomy. But she guessed at once, when she saw him look anxiously at the letter-box. She thought it strange that without having the right he should be jealous; but it did not displease her.

When they reached the Corso, in the distance they saw Miss Bell and Madame Marmet coming out of the milliner's.

Dechartre said to Thérèse in a voice at once imperious and entreating:

"I want to speak to you. I must see you alone; come to-morrow evening, at six o'clock to the Lungarno Acciajoli."

She said nothing.

XVI

HEN, wrapped in her rough coat, she reached the Lungarno Acciajoli, about half-past six, Dechartre welcomed her with a humble and radiant glance which touched her heart.

The setting sun was shedding a purple hue over the swollen waters of the Arno. For a moment they were silent. Following the monotonous line of palaces, they walked towards the Ponte Vecchio. She was the first to speak:

"You see I have come. I thought it my duty to come. I am not innocent of what has happened. I know it: I have done everything in order that your attitude towards me should be what it is now. My conduct has inspired you with thoughts which would not have otherwise occurred to you."

He seemed not to understand. She resumed:

"I was selfish, I was indiscreet. I liked you; your intelligence appealed to me; I could not do without you. I did everything in my power to attract and retain you. I flirted with you. But not in coldness of heart or intending to deceive. Still I flirted."

He shook his head, denying that he had ever perceived it.

"Yes, I flirted. But it is not my custom. However, I flirted with you. I don't say that you attempted to take advantage of it, as you had a perfect right to do, or that you were puffed up by it. I never thought you vain. Possibly you did not perceive it. High-minded men sometimes lack insight. But I know well that I was not what I should have been. And I ask you to forgive me. That is why I came. Let us remain good friends while we may."

With a sorrowful tenderness he told her that he loved her. In the beginning his love had been sweet and delightful. All he wanted was to see her and see her again. But soon she had agitated him, rent his heart, made him beside himself. His passion had broken forth suddenly and violently one day on the terrace at Fiesole. And now he lacked the courage to suffer in silence. He cried out for her help. He had come with no settled plan. If he had told her of his passion it was because he could not help it and in spite of himself, because of his overpowering craving to speak of her and to her, since for him she alone existed. His life was lived in her. She must know then that he loved her, not with any mild, indefinite love, but with an all-consuming, cruel passion. Alas! His imagination was precise. He knew exactly and always what he wanted, and it was torture to him.

And then it seemed to him that together they would have joys which made life worth living. Their existence would be a beautiful but secret work of art. They would think, they would comprehend, they would feel in unison. Theirs would be a wonderful world of emotions and ideas.

"We would make life a beautiful garden."

She pretended to interpret this dream in all innocence.

"You know how strongly your mind appeals to me. It has become necessary to me to see you and hear you. I have shown you this only too plainly. Be assured of my friendship, and be at rest."

She offered him her hand. He did not take it, and replied abruptly:

"I will not have your friendship. I will not have it. You must be mine entirely, or I must never see you again. Why with mocking words do you offer me your hand? Whether you intended it or not you have inspired me with a passionate desire, a fatal longing. You have become my heart's anguish and torture. And now you ask me to be your friend. It is now that you are cruel and a flirt. If you cannot love me, let me leave you; I will go, I do not know where, to forget you and hate you. For in the depths of my heart I feel towards you both anger and hatred. Oh! I love you, I love you."

She believed what he said. She feared lest he should go away; and she dreaded the sad dulness of life without him.

"I have found you in my life. I will not lose you. No, I will not," she said.

Timid, passionate, he tried to murmur something, but the words stuck in his throat. Darkness was descending on the distant mountains, and in the east, over the hill of San Miniato, were fading the last gleams of the setting sun.

She spoke again.

"If you had known my life, if you had seen how empty it was before you came into it, you would

know what you are to me, and you would not think of leaving me."

But the even tones of her voice and measured step upon the pavement irritated him. He cried out that he was in anguish; his desire burnt within him; this one thought possessed and tortured him; always and everywhere, by night, by day he saw her, he called her, he stretched out his arms to her. The divine passion had entered into his soul.

"Like incense I breathe the charm of your intellect, the inspiration of your courage, the pride of your soul. When you speak I seem to see your soul on your lips, and I die because I cannot press mine to yours. Your soul is for me but the expression of your beauty. Deep down within me there slumbered the instincts of primitive man. You have awakened them. And I feel that I love you with the simplicity of a savage."

She looked at him tenderly and in silence. Just then they saw lights and heard mournful songs approaching them out of the darkness. And then, like phantoms, driven by the wind, there appeared before them black-robed penitents. The crucifix was carried before them. They were the Brothers of the Misericordia. With their faces hidden by cowls they were holding lighted torches and singing psalms. They were bearing a corpse to the cemetery. It was the Italian custom for the funeral procession to take place at night and to pass along rapidly. On the deserted quay there appeared cross, coffin, and banners. Jacques and Thérèse stood against the wall to let pass the crowd of priests, choristers, and hooded figures, and, in their midst, importunate Death, whom no one welcomes on this pleasure-loving earth. The black stream had passed.

Weeping women ran after the coffin borne by weird shapes in hob-nailed boots.

Thérèse sighed:

"Of what avail is it to torment ourselves in this world?"

He appeared not to hear her, and resumed in a calmer voice:

"Before I knew you I was not unhappy. I loved life. It inspired me with dreams and with curiosity. I delighted in form and in the spirit of form, in the appearance which charms and soothes. To see and to dream were my joys. I enjoyed everything, and I was independent of everything. I was borne up on the wings of my insatiable curiosity. I was interested in everything; I longed for nothing: and it is only desire that makes us suffer. I realise that to-day. Mine was not a melancholy disposition. I was happy without knowing it. I possessed little, but all that was necessary to make me contented with life. Now that has departed from me. My pleasures, the interest I took in life and in art, the joy of expressing in material form the visions of my brain, you have robbed me of them all, and without leaving me one regret. I no longer desire my liberty. I would not return to the tranquillity of past years. It seems as if I never lived till I met you. And now that I know what life really is, I can live neither with you nor away from you. I am more wretched than the beggars we saw on the road to Ema. They at least had the air to breathe. But I have not that, for you are the breath of my life, and you I have not. Nevertheless I rejoice that I have known you. It is all that counts in my life. Just now I thought I hated you. I was mistaken. I adore you, and I bless you for the suffering you

have caused me. I love everything that comes from you."

They were approaching the dark trees at the entrance to the Porta San Niccola. On the other side of the river the land looked vague and infinite in the darkness. Seeing him once more calm and gentle, she thought that his passion, existing only in his imagination, had been appeased by expression and that his desire was merely a dream. She had not expected his resignation to come so quickly. She was almost disappointed at having escaped the danger she had so greatly feared.

She now offered him her hand more boldly than at first.

"Come, let us be friends. It is late. We must return, and you must take me to my carriage, which I have left on the Piazza della Signoria. I shall always be your good friend as I was before. You have not vexed me."

But he led her towards the open country, along the river bank, which became more and more deserted.

"No, I will not let you go before saying what was in my mind. But I cannot express myself; the words will not come. I love you; I want you. I long to know that you are mine. I swear to you that I will not pass another night in the horror of doubt."

He took her and clasped her in his arms. With his face close to hers he gazed through her veil and looked deep into her eyes.

"You must love me. I will it, you also have willed it. Say that you are mine. Say it!"

Having gently freed herself from his embrace, she replied in a weak hesitating voice:

"I cannot. I cannot. You see I am quite

frank with you. Just now I told you that you had not vexed me. But I cannot do as you wish."

And thinking of the absent lover awaiting her, she repeated:

"I cannot."

Bending over her, anxiously he questioned her wavering downcast glance.

"Why? You love me. I see it. Why do me the wrong of refusing to be mine?"

He drew her towards him and tried to kiss her lips beneath her veil. This time she withdrew quickly and decisively.

"I can't. Don't ask me. I can't be yours."

His lips trembled. His whole countenance was convulsed. He cried:

"You have a lover and you love him. Why do you trifle with me?"

"I swear that I never thought of trifling with you, and that if ever in this world I were to love it would be you."

But he no longer listened to her.

"Leave me. Leave me," he cried.

And he fled through the darkness. The Arno had overflowed its banks on to the pasture lands. There the water lay in shallow sheets, on to which the half veiled moon cast its quivering beams. Past these lagoons and over the muddy fields he hastened sadly and distractedly.

She was afraid and uttered a cry. She called him. But he neither replied nor turned his head. With alarming decision he continued on his way. She ran after him. With her feet bruised by the stones, her skirt heavy with water, she rejoined him and drew him towards her.

"What were you going to do?"

Then as he looked into her eyes, he read there the fear that had possessed her.

"Don't be afraid. I did not see where I was going. I assure you I was not seeking death. Set your mind at rest. I am despairing, but I am calm. I fled from you. Forgive me. But I could not bear to look at you. Leave me, I entreat of you. Good-bye."

Weak and intensely agitated, she replied:

"Come. We will see what can be done."

But he remained sorrowful and silent.

She repeated:

"Come."

She took his arm. The gentle touch of her hand cheered him.

"Will you?" he asked.

"I am determined not to drive you to despair."

"Will you promise?"

"I must."

Even in her anguish of spirit she half smiled to think how quickly his wildness had given him his desire.

"To-morrow?" he asked.

She replied eagerly with an instinct of self-defence:

"No, not to-morrow."

"You don't love me. You regret your promise," he said.

"No. I don't regret it, but . . ."

He implored her, entreated her. She looked at him for a moment, turned away her head, hesitated, and then said in a very low voice:

"Saturday."

XVII

FTER dinner Miss Bell was drawing profiles of bearded Etruscans on canvas for a cushion Madame Marmet was to embroider. Prince Albertinelli was choosing the wool with a feminine eye for colour. The evening was well advanced when Choulette appeared. As was his wont he had been playing *brissola** at an eating house with the cook. He was gay and god-like in the exuberance of his wit. He sat down on the sofa, by Madame Martin, and looked at her tenderly. His green eyes sparkled voluptuously. His compliments, poetical and picturesque, had the air of a caress. It was as if he were composing a love-song in her honour. In short, abrupt, curiously turned sentences he explained the charm by which she attracted him.

"He too," she thought.

And she amused herself by teasing him. Had he not discovered in the lower quarters of Florence one of those persons whose society he mostly enjoyed, she inquired. For his preferences in such matters were well known. It was useless for him to deny it; every one knew where he had found the cord of

* A game at cards.—W. S.

his third order. His friends had seen him on the Boulevard Saint-Michel with women of the street. And he had avowed his interest in these miserable creatures in his finest poems.

"Oh! Monsieur Choulette, by all I hear your friends are very wicked."

He replied solemnly:

"Madame, you may if you like throw in my face calumnies originating with M. Paul Vence. I will not defend myself. That you should be convinced of my chastity and pure-mindedness matters little. But do not lightly judge those whom you call wretched, whom you should regard as holy because they are miserable. The outcast is the docile clay in the potter's hand, the sin offering at the sacrificial altar. Prostitutes are nearer God than honest women: they have lost all vainglory; they have been shorn of pride. They are unadorned by those empty nothings, the matron's boast. They possess humility, that is the corner-stone of the heavenly house of virtue. After a brief repentance they will be first in the Kingdom of Heaven; for, committed without malice and without joy, their sins are their own atonement. Their vices, in that they are sorrows, have the merit of all suffering. Slaves to the brutality of passion, these women have denied themselves pleasure. Thus they resemble men who have become celibate that they may enter the Kingdom of God. Like us they are sinners, but by their shame they atone for their sins; suffering purifies like fire. Therefore the first prayer they address to Him God will hear. He has prepared for them a throne on the right hand of the Father. In the Kingdom of God, the queen and the empress will be happy to sit at the feet of women of the street.

For do not imagine that the heavenly house is constructed on any human plan. It is different in every detail, Madame."

Nevertheless he agreed that there was more than one road leading to salvation. There was the road of love.

"Men's love," he said, "is base. It is but a steep and stony path, but it leads to God."

The Prince had risen. Kissing Miss Bell's hand, he said:

"Till Saturday."

"Yes, till the day after to-morrow, till Saturday," repeated Vivian.

Thérèse shuddered. Saturday! They spoke so calmly of Saturday as if it were an ordinary day and near at hand. Until then she had not let herself believe that Saturday would come so soon or so naturally.

It was half an hour since the party had broken up. Thérèse, tired and weary, was lying in bed thinking, when she heard a knock at her bedroom door. It opened, and Vivian's little head appeared round the great lemon-trees of the portière.

"Am I disturbing you, darling? Are you sleepy?"

No, "darling" was not sleepy. She raised herself on her elbow. Vivian sat down on the bed, upon which her slender form made no impression.

"Darling, I know that you are very sensible. Oh! I am sure of it. You are as sensible as Mr. Sadler, the violinist, is musical. Sometimes he plays a little out of tune on purpose. And you when you

make a mistake indulge in the pleasure of a virtuoso. Oh! darling, you are a person of sound judgment. And I come to ask your advice."

Surprised and a little anxious, Thérèse declared that she was not sensible. She denied it absolutely. But Vivian did not listen to her.

"I have read François Rabelais a great deal, my love. Rabelais and Villon taught me French. They are grand old masters of language. But, darling, do you know *Pantagruel?* Oh! *Pantagruel* is a fine and beautiful town, full of palaces, splendid in the dawn, notwithstanding that the sweepers have yet to arrive to remove the filth and the servants to wash the marble pavements. No, darling, the sweepers have not yet removed the filth, and the servants have not yet washed the marble pavements. And I have noticed that French ladies don't read *Pantagruel.* You don't know it? Well, that does not matter. In *Pantagruel,* Panurge asks whether he should marry, and he appears ridiculous, my love. Well, I am as absurd as he, for I ask you the same question."

Thérèse replied with ill-concealed constraint:

"As for that, my dear. Don't ask me. I have already told you my opinion."

"But, darling, you merely said that men do wrong to marry. I can't take that advice for myself."

Madame Martin looked at Miss Bell's little close clipped head, which seemed in some curious manner to suggest the bashfulness of love.

Kissing her, she said:

"There isn't a man in the world distinguished enough and charming enough for you."

Then gravely and tenderly she continued:

"You are not a child: if you love and are loved, do what you think right, and don't complicate love by material interests which have nothing to do with feeling. That is the advice of a friend."

For a moment Miss Bell failed to understand. Then she blushed and rose. She was shocked.

XVIII

AT four o'clock on Saturday Thérèse went to the English cemetery, according to her promise. At the gate she met Dechartre, grave and agitated. He said little. She was glad he did not appear elated. He led her past the cemetery walls to a narrow street she did not know. "Via Alfieri," she read on a tablet. After walking a few steps, he stopped in front of a dark entry.

"Here it is," he said.

She looked at him with infinite sadness.

"Do you want me to go in?"

She saw that he was resolute, and she followed him silently into the damp gloom of the passage. He crossed a grass-grown courtyard. At the end was a little house with three windows, with pillars and a pediment carved with goats and nymphs. On the moss-grown doorstep, slowly and with a grating sound, he turned the key in the lock.

"It is rusty," he murmured.

"In this country all keys are rusty," she replied mechanically.

They went up the staircase, so tranquil beneath its Greek moulding, that it seemed to have forgotten the sound of footsteps. He opened a door and showed Thérèse into the room. Without staying

to examine it, she went straight to the open window, looking on the cemetery. Over the wall rose the tops of pine-trees, which, in that country, have no funereal aspect; for their mourning casts no gloom over joy, and the sweetness of life is felt even in the grass growing over the tomb. He took her by the hand and led her to an arm-chair. She remained standing, gazing round the room, which he had arranged so that she might feel at home. A few strips of old printed calico represented on the walls the melancholy delights of past gaiety. In one corner he had hung up a faded pastel they had looked at together in an antiquary's shop, and which she had called the shade of Rosalba on account of its vanishing grace. One or two white chairs and a grandmother's arm-chair; on the table a few painted cups and some Venetian glass. In the corners were screens of coloured paper, painted with masks, grotesque figures, and sheep-cotes, representing the gay life of Florence, Bologna, and Venice, in the days of the grand-dukes and the last doges. She noticed that he had carefully hidden the bed behind one of these gaily painted screens. A mirror, a carpet, and hangings, that was all. He had not dared to procure more in a town where ingenious dealers were always on his track.

He shut the window and lit the fire. She sat down in the arm-chair; and, while she sat there stiffly, he knelt before her, took her hands, kissed them, and gazed at her long with an admiration proud yet fearful. Then he bent down and kissed the tip of her shoe.

"What are you doing?"

"I am kissing the feet that brought you here."

He rose, drew her gently to him, and kissed her long on the lips.

She remained passive, her head thrown back, her eyes closed; her toque slipped off, her hair fell down.

She yielded without resistance.

Two hours later, when the setting sun was casting its long rays over the pavement, Thérèse, who had wished to go back through the town alone, found herself in front of the two obelisks of Santa-Maria-Novella, without knowing how she had come there. At the corner of the square she saw the old cobbler drawing his thread in the same monotonous manner. He was smiling, with his sparrow on his shoulder.

She went into his booth and sat down on a stool, and there she said in French:

"Quentin Matsys, my friend, what have I done, and what will become of me?"

He looked at her calmly, with cheerful good nature, making an effort to understand. He was past being astonished. She shook her head.

"What I did, my good Quentin, was because he was suffering, and I loved him. I do not regret it."

To which he answered, as was his custom, the sonorous Italian "yes":

"Si, si."

"I did no wrong, did I, Quentin? But what will happen now?"

She was going, but he signed to her to wait a moment. He carefully picked a spray of basil and gave it to her. "Take it for its sweet smell, Signora."

XIX

ON the morrow Madame Martin was reading at the window. Choulette greeted her, having first tenderly placed on the table his knotted stick, his pipe, and his carpet-bag. He was going to Assisi. He wore a goatskin jacket, and looked like the old shepherds in the story of the Nativity.

"Good-bye, Madame. I am leaving Fiesole, you, Dechartre, the effeminate Prince Albertinelli, and that charming ogress, Miss Bell. I go to visit the mountain of Assisi, which, says the poet, should be called not Assisi, but 'the Orient,' for thence rose the sun of love. I shall kneel before that happy crypt where reposes the naked body of St. Francis in a trough of stone, with a stone for a pillow. For he would not bear away even so much as a shroud from this world, to which he had revealed the secret of true happiness and true holiness."

"Good-bye, Monsieur Choulette. Bring me a Santa Chiara medal. I like Santa Chiara."

"You are right, Madame. She was a woman of strength and prudence. When, ill and almost blind, St. Francis came to spend a few days with his friend at San Damiano, with her own hands she built him a cell in the garden. His soul rejoiced. A painful weariness and burning of his eyelids deprived him of sleep. Rats attacked him by night. It was then that he composed that joyful hymn in honour of his

splendid brother, the Sun, and our chaste, useful, and pure sister, Water. My finest lines, even those of *Le Jardin Clos,* have less irresistible charm and natural splendour. And it is right that it should be so; for the soul of St. Francis was more beautiful than mine. Although I am better than any of my contemporaries, whom I have been privileged to know, I am worthless. When Francis had composed his hymn to the Sun, he was happy. He thought: My brethren and I will go through the towns, playing our lutes in the market-places on market-days. When the good people draw near us we will say: 'We are God's minstrels; we will sing you a lay. If it pleases you, you must reward us.' They will promise. And when we have sung, we shall say to them: 'Now for our reward; what we ask is that you shall love one another.' Doubtless, in order to keep their promise, and so please God's poor minstrels, they will forbear from doing each other harm."

Madame Martin thought St. Francis the most lovable of saints.

"His work," Choulette resumed, "was destroyed during his lifetime. Nevertheless he died happy, because joy and humility were his. He was indeed God's sweet singer. And it is fitting that another poor poet should take up his work, and teach the world true religion and true joy. That poet shall be I, Madame, if only I can cast away pride and wisdom. For all moral beauty is the result of that incomprehensible wisdom which comes from God and resembles madness."

"I will not discourage you, Monsieur Choulette. But I am anxious about the lot of poor women in your new society. You will shut them all up in convents."

"I confess," replied Choulette, "that in my projects for a reformation they cause me much embarrassment. The violence with which they are loved is bitter and bad. The pleasure they give brings no calm, and does not lead to joy. I, in my life, have for the sake of women committed two or three abominable crimes, of which no one knows. I doubt, Madame, whether I shall invite you to supper in the new Santa Maria degli Angeli."

He took up his pipe, his carpet-bag, and his stick with its human head.

"The faults of love will be pardoned—or, rather, one can do no wrong when one really loves. But sensual passion is compact of hatred, egoism, and wrath as much as of love. One evening, for having thought you beautiful as you sat on this sofa, I was assailed by a whole army of passionate thoughts. I had come from the *Albergo,* where I had heard Miss Bell's cook improvise two hundred magnificent lines on spring. My soul was flooded with a celestial joy which vanished at the sight of you. Eve's curse contains a profound truth. For in your presence I grew sad and wicked. Soft words were on my lips. But they lied. Within I felt myself your adversary; I hated you. When I saw you smile, I wanted to kill you."

"Really?"

"Oh, Madame, it is a very natural feeling, and one that you must have often inspired. But the ordinary man feels it without knowing what it is, whilst my vivid imagination defines it clearly. I am in the habit of contemplating my own soul; sometimes I find it splendid, sometimes hideous. If you had seen it that evening, you would have been horrified."

Thérèse smiled.

"Good-bye, Monsieur Choulette; don't forget the Santa Chiara medal."

He put his bag on the ground, and, stretching out his arm, with his forefinger raised in the manner of one who teaches, he said:

"From me you have nothing to fear. But him whom you shall love and who shall love you will be your enemy. Farewell, Madame."

He took up his bag and went out. She saw his tall quaint form disappear behind the shrubs in the garden.

In the afternoon she went to San Marco, where Dechartre was waiting for her. She longed and yet she feared to see him again so soon. Her anguish of heart was appeased by a new feeling of intense sweetness. The moral numbness of her first yielding to passion, followed by a sudden vision of the irreparable, did not recur. She was now under serener, vaguer, more powerful influences. This time the memory of caresses and the violence of passion was veiled in a charming revery. She was troubled and anxious, but not ashamed or regretful. It was not so much by her own will as in obedience to a higher power that she had acted. She justified her action by its unselfishness. She counted on nothing, having expected nothing. Certainly she had been wrong to yield when she was not free, but then she on her part had exacted nothing. Perhaps she was for him only a passing fancy all absorbing, yet serious only for the moment. She did not know him. She had not put to the test those fine imaginings, which are so far above mediocrity in evil as well as in good. If he were suddenly to depart and disappear, she would not reproach him, she would not bear him ill-will, at least she believed so. She

would treasure the memory of what is rarest and most precious in the world. Perhaps he was incapable of an enduring love. He had thought he loved her. He had loved her for an hour. She did not dare to hope for more in the embarrassment of a false position in which her frankness and her pride were outraged and the usual clearness of her thought obscured. While the carriage was bearing her to San Marco, she succeeded in persuading herself that he would not mention what had happened on the previous day, and that the memory of that room, looking on the dark pine-trees, would be to them both but the dream of a dream.

He gave her his hand as she got out of the carriage. Before he spoke she saw by his glance that he loved her and that he wanted her still; and she perceived at the same time that she was pleased it should be so.

"It is you," he said, "really you—I have been here since noon, waiting, knowing that you would not come yet, but feeling that I could not live away from the place where I was to see you. It is you! . . . Speak that I may see you and hear you."

"Do you still love me?"

"It is now that I really love you. I thought I loved you when you were but a phantom pursued by my desire. Now you are the body of my soul. Is it true, say, can it be true that you are mine? What have I done that I should possess the greatest, the only good upon earth? And those other men who fill the earth! They think they live! But I alone live! Say what have I done to possess this treasure?"

"Oh! what has been done has been done by me. I tell you frankly. If we come to that, it is my

fault. She may not always avow it, but it is always the woman's fault. So, whatever may happen, I shall never reproach you."

An active noisy troop of beggars, guides, and profligates came out of the church porch and surrounded them with an importunity mingled with that grace always characteristic of the nimble Italian. They were subtle enough to guess they had to deal with lovers, and they knew that lovers are generous. Dechartre threw them a few silver pieces, and they all returned to their happy idleness.

A policeman met the visitors. Madame Martin regretted that it was not a monk. At Santa-Maria-Novella, the white robes of the Dominicans looked so beautiful under the arches of the cloister.

They visited the cells where Fra Angelico, aided by his brother Benedetto, painted innocent pictures on the white walls for his comrades, the monks.

"Do you remember that winter evening when I met you on the little bridge over a ditch in front of the Guimet Museum and accompanied you to that little street bordered by gardens and leading to the Quai de Billy? Before parting, we paused for a moment by the thin box hedge running along the parapet. You looked at the box which the winter had dried and withered. And after you had gone, I stayed and gazed at it."

They were in the cell of Savonarola, the prior of the monastery of San Marco. The guide showed them the portrait and the relics of the martyr.

"What could you see to admire in me that day? It was nearly dark."

"I could see you walk. It is by motion that forms speak. Each of your steps revealed to me the secret of your regular beauty and your charm. Oh!

when you are concerned my imagination has never kept within the bounds of discretion. I did not dare to speak to you. The sight of you filled me with fear. I was terrified before her who could do everything for me. In your presence I adored you with trembling. Away from you I felt all the irreverence of desire."

"I never guessed it. But do you remember the first time we met, when Paul Vence introduced you? You were sitting by the screen, looking at the miniatures hanging on it. You said: 'That woman, painted by Siccardi, is like André Chénier's mother.' I replied: 'That's my husband's grandmother. What was André Chénier's mother like?' And you said: 'We have her portrait, that of a degenerate Levantine woman.'"

He was sure he had not spoken so rudely.

"But yes. My memory is better than yours."

They walked, surrounded by the white silence of the monastery. They visited the cell that Blessed Angelico adorned with the softest painting. And there before the picture of the Virgin on a pale blue sky receiving the immortal crown from God the father, he took Thérèse in his arms and kissed her on the lips, almost in sight of two Englishwomen, passing down the corridor, reading Baedeker.

"We must not forget to visit St. Anthony's cell," she said.

"Thérèse, I cannot bear that any part of you should escape from me. It is terrible to think that you do not live in me and for me alone. I long to possess entirely you and your past."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh! as for the past!"

"The past alone is real. The past alone exists."

She looked up at him with eyes like the sun shining through the rain:

"Well I can say very truly: I never really live except when I am with you."

On her return to Fiesole, she found a short threatening letter from Le Ménil. He could not understand her silence and her prolonged absence. If she did not immediately name the date of her return he would come to Florence.

She read his letter, not in any way surprised, yet overwhelmed by the realisation that the inevitable was happening and that she would be spared nothing of all she had feared. She might yet pacify and reassure him. She had only to write that she loved him, that she was soon coming back, and that he must renounce the wild idea of meeting her at Florence, which was only a village, where they would be recognised immediately. But she must write: "I love you." She must soothe him with loving words. She had not the courage. She allowed him to guess the truth. In vague terms she accused herself. She wrote mysteriously of souls carried away on the waves of life and how powerless one is on the ocean of vicissitude. Sadly and tenderly she asked him to keep a kindly memory of her in one corner of his heart.

She herself went to post the letter on the Piazza of Fiesole. In the twilight some children were playing at hop-scotch. From the top of the hill she looked down on the beautiful basin and Florence like a lovely jewel nestling in the hollow. The peacefulness of evening made her shudder. She dropped the letter into the box. And then only did she clearly realise what she had done and what would be its result.

XX

THE bright spring sun was casting its golden beams on the Piazza della Signoria, when at the striking of the hour of twelve the country crowd of corn-dealers and macaroni merchants began to break up. At the foot of the Lanzi, in front of the group of statues, the ice-cream sellers had erected little castles with the inscription *Bibite ghiacciate*, on tables covered with red cotton. Joy and gaiety seemed to have come down to earth from heaven. Thérèse and Jacques, on their way home from a morning walk in the Boboli Gardens, were passing the famous loggia. Thérèse was looking at John of Bologna's Sabine woman, with that curious interest with which one woman looks at another. But Dechartre had eyes for Thérèse alone.

"It is wonderful," he said, "how the bright daylight enhances your beauty; it seems to linger lovingly on the pearl white of your cheeks."

"Yes," she said. "Candle-light always hardens my features. I have noticed that. It is unfortunate that I am not an evening beauty; for in the evening women have most opportunity of displaying their good looks. In the evening Princess Seniavine has a lovely olive complexion; by daylight she is as yellow as a guinea. I must admit that it does not trouble her. She is not a coquette."

"And you are."

"Oh! yes. I used to be for my own sake, now I am for yours."

She looked again at the robust, long-limbed Sabine woman, who was endeavouring to escape from the Roman's embrace.

"Is that angularity and length of limb a necessary quality in a beautiful woman? I am not like that."

Dechartre hastily reassured her. But she had not really doubted. Now she was looking at the ice cream man's little château, with its copper walls gleaming on the scarlet table-cloth. She suddenly felt a desire to eat an ice there, standing at this table, as she had just seen the working women of the town do.

"Wait a moment," he said.

He ran to a street on the left of the Lanzi and disappeared.

In a minute he returned with a little silver gilt spoon, from which the gilding was partly worn away, and the handle of which was formed by a Florentine lily with its calyx enamelled in red.

"This is for you to eat your ice with. The ice-cream man does not provide spoons. You would have been obliged to use your tongue. It would have been charming. But you would not have known how to do it."

She recognised the spoon; it was a little gem she had noticed the day before in a shop window near the Lanzi.

They were happy. The fulness of their simple joy overflowed in trivial, meaningless words. And they laughed when the Florentine with excellent mimicry told them the time-honoured tales of old Italian story-tellers. She was entertained by the

play of his classic, jovial countenance. But she did not always understand him.

"What is he saying?" she asked Jacques.

"Do you want to know?"

She did.

"Well! he says he would be happy if the fleas in his bed were as pretty as you."

When she had finished her ice, he urged her to revisit Or San-Michele. It was so close. They would cross to the opposite corner of the square and there they would see the jewel in stone. They went. They looked at the bronze St. George and St. Mark. On the encrusted wall of the house Dechartre saw the letter-box, and remembered with painful vividness the little gloved hand posting the letter. The copper mouth that had swallowed Thérèse's secret appeared to him hideous. He could not look away from it. All his gaiety had vanished. Meanwhile she was trying to appreciate the rough statue of the Evangelist.

"Yes, indeed he looks frank and honest. If he could speak his words would always be true."

"His is no woman's mouth," Dechartre retorted bitterly.

She understood, and said very sweetly:

"My friend, why do you say that? I am frank."

"What do you call being frank? You know that a woman is bound to lie."

She hesitated. Then:

"A woman," she said, "is frank when she does not lie uselessly."

XXI

HÉRÈSE, in grey, was gliding among the flowering broom bushes. The silver stars of the arbutus covered the steep slope of the terrace, and, on the hill-side gleamed the sweet scented flame-like flowers of the oleander. The Florentine valley was one mass of flowers.

Vivian Bell, dressed in white, came into the perfumed garden.

"You see, darling, Florence is really the city of flowers; and it is right she should have the red lily for her emblem. To-day is a festival."

"Ah! is it a feast-day?"

"Darling, don't you know that it is the first of May, the *Primavera?* Did you not awake this this morning in fairyland? Aren't you keeping the Festival of Flowers, darling? Don't you feel gay, you who love flowers? For you do love them, I know. You feel tenderly towards them. You said that they feel joy and sorrow, that they suffer as we do."

"Did I say that they suffer like us?"

"Yes, you said so. To-day is their festival. You must celebrate it according to the custom of our ancestors, in rites depicted by the old masters."

Thérèse heard without comprehending. Crushed

in her gloved hand was a letter she had just received, bearing the Italian post-mark and containing only two lines:

"I arrived to-night at the Hotel de la Grande Bretagne, Lungarno, Acciajoli. I expect you to-morrow morning. No. 18."

"Oh! darling, don't you know that at Florence it is our custom to welcome the springtime on the first of May? Then you can't have understood Botticelli's picture of the Feast of Flowers, his delightful *Spring,* so full of happy revery. Formerly, darling, on this first day of May, the whole town was merry. The girls of Florence, in festive garb, crowned with hawthorn, passed in procession up the Corso, beneath arches of flowers, to dance under the oleanders on the fresh green grass. We will imitate them. We will dance in the garden."

"Are we going to dance in the garden?"

"Yes, darling, and I will teach you some fifteenth-century Tuscan dances, discovered in a MS. by Mr. Morison, the *doyen* of London librarians. Come back quickly my love; we will wreathe our heads with flowers and then we will dance."

"Yes, dear, we will dance."

And, opening the gate, she hurried down the little path with channels worn by the rain like the bed of a mountain torrent, and stones hidden beneath briar roses. She jumped into the first carriage she met. The driver had cornflowers in his hat and on his whip-handle.

"Hotel de la Grande Bretagne, Lungarno Acciajoli," she said.

She knew where it was, Lungarno Acciajoli. . . . She had been there, in the evening, and she remembered the golden light of the setting sun on the

surging waters of the river. Then night had come; and she heard the water's dull murmur in the silence; words and glances had agitated her, and her lover's first kiss, the beginning of an irreparable love. Oh! Yes, she remembered Lungarno Acciajoli and the river bank beyond the Ponte Vecchio. . . . Hotel de la Grande Bretagne. . . . She knew a broad stone façade on the quay. It was fortunate, if he must come, that he was staying there. He might have gone to the Hotel de la Ville, on the Piazzi Manin, where Dechartre was staying. It was fortunate that their rooms were not side by side in the same corridor. . . . Lungarno Acciajoli! . . . That corpse they had seen hurrying by, borne by cowled monks, it was at rest in some little garden cemetery.

Number 18.

It was a bare Italian hotel room with a stove. A set of brushes was carefully set out on the table, and by them a railway guide. Not a book, not a newspaper. He was there: she read suffering and feverish excitement on his thin face; and its sad expression pained her. He awaited a word, a sign; but she remained silent, motionless, and afraid.

He offered her a chair. She put it on one side and continued standing.

"Thérèse, there is something that I do not know. Speak."

After a moment's silence, she replied with painful hesitation:

"Why did you leave me in Paris?"

The sadness of her tone made him believe, and he wished to believe, that she was reproaching him. He blushed and replied eagerly:

"Ah! If I had foreseen! You must know that

at heart I cared little for that hunting-party! But you, your letter of the 27th (he had a good memory for dates) made me terribly anxious. Something had happened when you wrote it. Tell me everything."

"I thought, dear, that you had ceased to love me."

"But now you know that to be untrue."

"Now . . ."

She was still standing with her hands clasped.

Then with assumed tranquillity, she said:

"Our union was formed in ignorance. One never knows. You are young, younger than I, since we are nearly of an age. Doubtless you have plans for the future."

He looked her haughtily in the face. She continued with less assurance.

"Your relatives, your mother, your aunts have made plans for you. It is quite natural. I ought to have guessed that there was some obstacle. It is better that I should disappear from your life. We shall keep a kindly memory of each other."

She offered him her gloved hand. He folded his arms.

"And so you are tired of me," he said. "You think that when you have made me happier than any other man has ever been, you can put me on one side, that everything is over! . . . And what have you come to tell me? That a union such as ours is quickly sundered. That a parting is easy? . . . I tell you, no! You are not the kind of woman from whom one parts."

"Yes, you probably loved me with an affection stronger than is usual in such cases. I was more to you than a passing fancy. But, what if I were not the woman you thought me, what if I were a flirt,

and betrayed you. . . . You know what has been said. . . . Well! what if I have not been all that I ought to have been . . ."

She hesitated and resumed in a grave serious tone which contrasted with her words:

"Supposing that while I was your mistress I yielded to other attractions and was possessed by other longings. Perhaps I am not made for a serious passion. . . ."

He interrupted her.

"You lie," he said.

"Yes, I lie. And I do not lie well. I wanted to spoil our past. I was wrong. It is what you know it was. But . . ."

"But . . .?"

"Well! I always told you I am not to be depended on. There are women, so I am told, who are mistresses of their feelings. I warned you that I was not like them, that I am not answerable for mine."

He looked left and right and turned his head like a creature irritated and yet hesitating to attack.

"What do you mean? I don't understand. I understand nothing. Explain yourself. There is something between us. I don't know what. But I am determined to know. What is it?"

"It is because I am not sure of myself, dear. You ought never to have placed your confidence in me. No, you ought never to have done it. I never promised anything. . . . And, then, if I had promised, what are words?"

"You love me no longer. You have ceased to love me, I see it well. But, so much the worse for you! I love you. You ought never to have given yourself to me. It is no use your thinking you can take back that gift. I love you and I keep you.

. . . Ah! You thought you were easily rid of me? Listen. You made me love you; you charmed me; it is your fault that I cannot live without you. You enjoyed your share in our raptures. I did not take you by force. You were willing. Six weeks ago you asked for nothing better. You were everything to me. I was everything to you. So complete was our union that our very lives were mingled. And then all of a sudden you ask me to forget you, to regard you as a stranger, a casual acquaintance. Ah! you have an unparalleled assurance. Tell me, was I dreaming when I felt your kisses and your breath upon my neck? Was it not true? Am I imagining it all? Oh! I cannot doubt that you loved me once. I feel the breath of your love upon me still. And yet, I have not changed. I am what I was. You have nothing with which to reproach me. I have never deceived you. Not that it is any credit to me. I could not have done it. When one has known you, all other women, even the most beautiful, appear insipid. The idea of deceiving you never occurred to me. I always treated you honourably. Then why have you ceased to love me? But tell me, speak. Say that you still love me. Say so, since it must be true. Come, come! Thérèse, you will feel at once that you love me, as you used to love me in our little nest in the Rue Spontini, where we were so happy. Come!"

Passionately, eagerly, he threw his strong arms around her. She, with tears in her eyes, repulsed him icily.

He understood and said:

"You have a lover."

She bowed her head, and then raised it, grave and silent.

Then he struck her on the breast, on the shoulder, and in the face. But immediately he drew back ashamed, and looked down in silence. With his fingers on his lips, biting his nails, he noticed that his hand had been scratched by a pin in her bodice. He threw himself into an arm-chair, took out his handkerchief to dry the blood, and remained as if benumbed and stupefied.

She, leaning against the door, pale, her head erect, her glance uncertain, was instinctively unpinning her torn veil and readjusting her hat.

At the sound, once so delicious, of the rustling of her clothes, he shuddered, looked at her, and relapsed into fury.

"Who is it?" he asked. "I must know."

She did not move. On her white face was a red mark where his hand had struck her. She replied firmly and gently:

"I have told you all I could. Ask me no more. It would be useless."

He looked at her with a cruel glance she had never seen before.

"Oh! you need not tell me his name. I shall have no difficulty in finding him."

She was silent, sad for him, anxious for another, full of fear and anguish, yet without bitterness, sorrow, or regret, for her heart was elsewhere.

He seemed to know what was passing within her. In his wrath at beholding her so sweet and serene, beautiful, but not as he had known her, beautiful for another, he felt a desire to kill her, and he cried:

"Go—go."

Then overpowered by the passion of that hatred, which was not natural to him, he put his head in his hands and sobbed.

His grief touched her and gave her hope that she might be able to calm him and render her departure less agonising. She imagined that she might console him for losing her. In a friendly and confiding manner she sat down beside him.

"You must blame me," she said. "I deserve blame but also pity. Despise me, if you like, and if you can despise a miserable creature who is life's plaything. Judge me, as you will. But in your wrath feel a little friendliness towards me; let me be a bitter-sweet memory like those autumn days when there is sunshine and east wind. That is what I deserve. Don't be hard on the pleasant but frivolous visitor who has crossed your path. Bid me farewell as if I were a sad traveller who goes away she knows not whither. It is always so sad to part! You were angry with me just now. I don't reproach you. But it grieves me. Show me some sympathy. Who knows? The future is always uncertain. It lies vague and dark before me. Let me be able to say that I have been kind, simple, and frank with you, and that you have not forgotten me. In time you will come to understand and to forgive. But to-day, just be pitiful."

He was not listening to the words she said, but the soft clear sound of her voice soothed him. He said suddenly:

"You do not love him. It is I whom you love. Then——"

She hesitated, then said:

"Oh: to say whom one loves and whom one does not love is no easy matter for a woman, at least for me. I don't know how others do; for life is not merciful. One is battered and thrown and driven——"

He looked at her very calmly. An idea had occurred to him. He had made a resolve. It was quite simple. He would forgive, he would forget, if only she would return at once.

"Thérèse, you don't love him? It was a mistake, a moment's forgetfulness, a horrible stupid thing that you did, surprised in an instant of weakness, or perhaps out of pique. Swear to me that you will never see him again."

He took hold of her arm, saying, "Swear."

She was silent, her lips tightly closed, looking darkly.

"You are hurting me," she cried.

But he did not desist. He dragged her to the table, where, as well as the brushes, were an ink-pot and a few sheets of letter-paper each bearing a picture of the hotel façade with its numerous windows.

"Write what I dictate. I will send the letter."

And, when she resisted, he forced her on to her knees. Proudly and calmly, she said:

"I cannot. I will not."

"Why?"

"Because . . . Do you want to know? . . . Because I love him."

Suddenly he let her go. If he had had a revolver at hand, perhaps he would have killed her. But almost immediately his wrath melted into sadness; and, then despairing, it was his own life he would have taken.

"Are you speaking the truth? Is it possible? Is it true?"

"Do I myself know? Can I tell? Can I understand yet? Can I think? Can I feel? Can I see any ray of light? Can I . . ."

Then with a slight effort she added:

"At this moment can I realise anything but my sadness and your despair?"

"You love him! You love him!" he cried. "How has he made you love him?"

He was stupefied by surprise, overwhelmed with astonishment. Nevertheless, what she had said had separated them. He no longer dared to handle her roughly, to seize her, to strike her, and treat her as his chattel. He repeated:

"You love him! You love him! But what did he say to you, what has he done to make you love him? I know you: I did not always tell you when your ideas shocked me. I wager that this lover of yours is not even a man in society. And you think he loves you? You think so? Well you are mistaken: he does not love you. He will give you up at the first opportunity. He will have had enough of you when he has compromised you. Then you will pass from one affair to another. Next year the worst things will be said of you. I am sorry for your father, who is my friend. He will know of your conduct; for you will not be able to deceive him."

She listened, humiliated and yet consoled, for she knew she would have suffered more deeply had she found him magnanimous.

He despised her in his simplicity; and his scorn consoled him. He tested it to the full.

"How did it happen?" he asked. "You need not hesitate to tell me."

She shrugged her shoulders with such obvious pity for him that he did not dare continue in this strain. He resumed bitterly:

"Do you think I shall help you to save the situa-

tion, that I shall continue to visit your husband and be a third in your household?"

"I expect you to do what a gallant man ought to do. I ask you for nothing. I should have liked to remember you as a dear friend. I had expected you to be kind and charitable. It is impossible. I see such partings must always be bitter. Later you will think better of me. Good-bye."

He looked at her. Now his face was more expressive of sorrow than of wrath. She had never seen his eyes look so hard or deeply ringed, or his temples appearing so plainly beneath his thin hair. He seemed to have aged in an hour.

"I must warn you," he said. "It will be impossible for me to meet you again. You are not the kind of woman whom, after what has passed between us, one can continue to meet in society. As I have said, you are a woman apart. You have a poison of your own, which you have given me; I feel it within me, in my veins, everywhere. Why did I ever know you?"

She looked at him kindly.

"Good-bye! Say to yourself that I am not worth such bitter regrets."

Then, when he saw her with her hand on the door handle, when he felt that he was about to lose her, that he would never possess her again, he uttered a cry and rushed forward. He remembered nothing. All that he felt was the numbness which follows a great misfortune, an irreparable loss. But this feeling of having been stunned gave place to desire. He wanted once more the mistress, who was going, never to return. He drew her to him. With all the strength of his physical nature he wanted her. She was on the watch and resisted him with all the power

of her will. Dishevelled and disarranged, she freed herself without having even felt afraid.

He understood that it would be useless; the lost sequence of facts returned to him, and he realised that she could not be his because she was another's. His anguish revived; he hurled insults at her and pushed her out of the room.

For a moment she lingered in the passage, proudly waiting for a word, a look worthy of their past love.

But again he cried: "Go," and banged the door.

Via Alfieri! She returned to the little house at the back of the courtyard, overgrown with pale green grass. It seemed peaceful, silent, faithful, with its goats and nymphs, carved for the lovers of the days of the Grand-Duchess Eliza. Already she felt a sense of escape from a sorrowful and brutal world, as if she had been carried through the ages to a life where suffering was unknown. At the bottom of the staircase, the steps of which were strewn with roses, Dechartre was waiting for her. She fell into his arms and remained there passive, while he carried her upstairs like the precious relic of her before whom he had once grown pale and trembled. With eyes half closed she tasted the superb humiliation of feeling herself his. Her weariness, her sadness, the mortifications of the day, the memory of violence, her re-conquered liberty, the desire to forget, some vestige of fear, all intensified her tenderness. Lying on the bed, she clasped her arms round her lover's neck.

They were as gay as children. They laughed, talked nonsense, and played as they sucked lemons, oranges, and water-melons piled near them on painted plates.

She was flushed with pride in the comeliness of the body she was offering upon the altar of love. For she had discarded her clothes save for one thin rose-hued garment, and this had slipped scarfwise from her shoulder, laying bare one breast, whilst the warmer tinted tip of the other glowed through the rosy gossamer that veiled it.

Her half open lips displayed the whiteness of her teeth. With coquettish anxiety, she asked whether, after all his glowing dreams of her, he had not been disappointed.

In the half-light, which he had contrived, he contemplated her with youthful ardour, mingling kisses with his praises.

In pretty caresses, loving disputes, and happy glances they passed the time, till all of a sudden grave, with looks overcast and compressed lips, a prey to that sacred wrath which brings love near hatred they plunged into the abyss of passion.

Then her head upon the pillow, her hair flowing, she would open her eyes bathed in tears, and smile sweetly.

He asked her how she had come by that little red mark on the temple. She replied that she did not know and that it was nothing.

It was hardly a lie. For really she had forgotten.

They recalled their beautiful short story—which yet covered all their life, for life began the day they first met.

"You remember being on the terrace the day after your arrival. You talked vaguely and incoherently. I guessed then that you loved me."

"I was afraid you thought me stupid."

"You were rather. But that was my triumph. I was beginning to grow impatient with your serenity

in my presence. I loved you before you loved me. Oh! I am not ashamed of it."

He poured into her mouth a few drops of sparkling Asti. But on the table was a bottle of Trasimene wine. She wanted to taste it in memory of that lake lying in the evening light so melancholy and beautiful in its opal cup. She had seen it during her first visit to Italy, six years ago.

He reproached her with having appreciated beauty without his aid.

"But, without you, I should never have seen anything," she said. "Why did you not come sooner?"

He silenced her with a kiss.

And she exhausted with joy cried:

"Yes, I love you! Yes, I have never loved any one but you."

XXII

E MÉNIL had written: "I leave tomorrow evening at seven. Be at the station."

She had come. As she approached the hotel omnibuses, there she saw him in his long grey Inverness, calm and correct. He merely said:

"Ah! You here!"

"But you asked me to come."

He would not confess that his letter had been written in the wild hope that perhaps after all she might love him again, that everything might be forgotten and that he might hear her say: "It was only to try you."

If she had spoken thus he would have believed her at once.

But her silence disappointed him; and he said bitterly:

"What have you to say to me? It is for you to speak, not for me. I have nothing to explain. I have no falseness to excuse."

"My friend, don't be cruel; bear me no ill-will for what is past. That is what I came to say. But I want to tell you too, that I bid you farewell with the sadness of a true friend."

"Is that all? Go and say it to the other; it will interest him more than me."

"You asked me to come, and I came. Don't make me regret it."

"I am sorry I have troubled you. Doubtless you could have employed your time better. Don't let me detain you. Go to him, as you are longing to."

Struck by the thought that these poor miserable words represented but a moment of humanity's eternal suffering, and haunted by the memory of many similar words in tragic drama, Thérèse's lips curled with ironical sadness. He thought she was smiling.

"Don't laugh. Listen. At the hotel, the day before yesterday, I wanted to kill you. I came so near doing it that now I know what it means. And I shall not do it. You need not fear. Besides, what would be the good? As I wish to keep up appearances for my own sake, I shall call on you in Paris. I shall learn with regret that you cannot see me. I shall see your husband. I shall also see your father. It will be to take my leave before a long absence. Good-bye, Madame."

Just as he was turning away from her, Thérèse saw Miss Bell and Prince Albertinelli coming out of the goods station and walking towards her. The Prince looked very handsome. Vivian was walking by him in all the gladness of maidenly joy.

"Oh! darling! What a delightful surprise to find you here. The Prince and I have been to the custom-house to claim my bell, which has just arrived."

"Ah! has your bell come?"

"It is here, darling, Ghiberti's bell! I have seen it in its wooden packing-case. It would not ring because it was a prisoner. But, in my house at Fiesole, I will lodge it in a campanile. When it breathes Florentine air, it will delight to make its

silver voice heard. Visited by doves, it will ring out all our joys and all our sorrows. It will ring for you, for me, for the Prince, for good Madame Marmet, for M. Choulette, for all our friends."

"Bells never ring out true joys and sorrows, dear. They are mere dutiful officials who know none but official feelings."

"Darling, you are mistaken. Bells know the heart's secrets; they know everything. But I am so glad to meet you. Oh! I know why you are at the station. Your maid betrayed you. She told me you were expecting a pink gown, which had not come, and that you were burning with impatience. But don't worry. You are always perfectly beautiful, my love."

She made Madame Martin get into the trap.

"Come quickly, darling. M. Jacques Dechartre is dining with us to-night; and I don't want to keep him waiting."

And, after they had driven in silence along the lanes, smelling sweetly of wild flowers, Vivian said:

"Do you see down there, darling, the black distaffs of the Fates, the cypress trees in the cemetery? It is my wish one day to lie beneath them."

But Thérèse was thinking anxiously:

"They saw him. Did she recognise him? I don't think so. It was growing dark; and the lights were dazzling. Perhaps she does not know him. I can't remember whether she met him at my house last year."

What troubled her most was the Prince's ill-concealed rejoicing.

"Darling, will you lie by my side, in that rural cemetery, beneath a little earth and the vast spaces of the sky? But it is foolish of me to give you an

invitation which you can't accept. You will not be permitted to sleep your last sleep at the foot of the Fiesole hills, my love. You will have to rest at Paris, beneath a handsome monument, by the side of Count Martin-Bellème."

"Why? Do you think, dear, that a wife should remain united to her husband even after death?"

"Certainly, she should, darling. Marriage is for time and for eternity. Don't you know the story of the husband and wife of Auvergne, who loved one another? They died almost together, and were buried in two graves, separated by a road. But every night a wild rose threw a spray of flowers between the two graves; in the end the coffins had to be put together."

When they had passed the Badia, they saw a procession winding up the hill slopes. The evening breeze was blowing out the flickering flames of the candles in their gilded wooden candlesticks. The painted banners were surrounded by girls in the white and blue of their religious society. Then came a little St. John, fair with curly hair, naked except for the lamb's fleece, showing his bare arms and shoulders; and then a St. Mary Magdalen of seven, robed in the gold of her crimped hair. The inhabitants of Fiesole were following in a crowd. Countess Martin recognised Choulette in their midst. He was singing, a candle in one hand, his book in the other, blue spectacles on the end of his nose. The candle cast a yellow light over his flat features, the bumps on his skull, and his dishevelled hair. His unkempt beard rose and fell to the measure of the hymn. In the lurid lights and shadows he looked old and robust, and, like the hermits, capable of living through a century of penance.

"How grand he is!" said Thérèse. "He poses to himself. He is a great artist."

"Oh! darling, why won't you allow that M. Choulette is really pious? Why? It is so sweet and so beautiful to believe. Poets realise that. If M. Choulette had no faith, he would not be able to write such fine verses."

"And you, dear, have you faith?"

"Oh! yes, I believe in God and in the words of Christ."

At length the canopy, the banners, and the white veils had all disappeared round a corner of the hill. But Choulette's bare head, illuminated by the candle-light, was still to be seen.

Meanwhile, Dechartre was waiting alone in the garden. Thérèse found him, leaning against the balustrade of that terrace, where he had felt the first agony of love. While Miss Bell and the Prince were choosing a place for the new bell's campanile, he took Thérèse for a moment in among the broom bushes.

"You promised to be in the garden on my arrival. I have been waiting for an hour, which seemed like eternity. You ought not to have gone out. Your absence surprised and distressed me."

She replied vaguely that she had been obliged to go to the station, and that Miss Bell had driven her back in the trap.

He asked her to forgive his anxiety. But every-thing alarmed him. Even his happiness made him tremble.

They were already at dinner when Choulette ap-peared, looking like some ancient satyr, a strange light gleaming in his phosphorescent eyes. Since

his return from Assisi, he had lived with the people. He spent his days drinking Chianti wine with doubtful women and working men, admonishing them to be glad and innocent, announcing the coming of Jesus Christ and the quickly approaching abolition of taxes and military service. After the procession, he had assembled the crowd in the ruins of the Roman theater, and in Macaronic language, a jumble of French and Tuscan, preached a sermon, which he was now pleased to repeat:

"Kings, Senators, and Judges have said: 'We are the life of the people.' Now they lie. They are the coffin who says: 'I am the cradle.'

"The life of the people is in the fields growing white unto the harvest in the sight of the Lord. It is in the vines hanging from the branches of the young elms, and in the smiles and the tears which the heavens rain down upon the fruits of the trees in the meadows and orchards.

"The life of the people is not in the laws, made by the powerful and rich for the preservation of power and wealth.

"The heads of kingdoms, and republics have written in their books that international law is the law of war. And they have glorified violence. They honour conquerors; in the public squares they erect statues to the victor and to his steed. But no one has the right to kill: wherefore the just man will refuse to draw his number for conscription. No man has the right to encourage the madness and the crimes of a prince who has been placed over a kingdom or a republic: wherefore the just man will not pay taxes; and he will not give his money to the publicans. In peace he will enjoy the fruit of

his labour; and he will make bread of the corn he has sown, and he will eat of the fruits of the trees he has trimmed."

"Ah! Monsieur Choulette," said Prince Albertinelli gravely, "you are right to take an interest in the condition of our poor country, ruined by taxation. What profit can one derive from land taxed at the rate of 33 per cent. on its net annual value? Master and servants are alike the prey of the publicans."

Dechartre and Madame Martin were both struck by the unexpected sincerity of his manner.

"I love the King," he added. "There is no question of my loyalty. But I grieve for the sufferings of the peasants."

The truth is that he was pertinaciously pursuing one single object: that of restoring his country estate of Casentino. His father, one of Victor-Emmanuel's artillery officers, had left three-quarters of it in the hands of money-lenders. His son concealed his purpose beneath affected indolence. But he allowed himself no vices except such as were useful and would tend to accomplish the object of his life. It was with the design of becoming a great Tuscan landed proprietor that he had dealt in pictures, secretly sold the famous ceilings of his palace, paid his addresses to old women, and finally asked for the hand of Miss Bell, whom he knew to be an adept at money-making and housekeeping. He really loved the land and its peasants. And Choulette's fervent words, which he only half understood, appealed to that love. He permitted himself to say what he really thought:

"In a country where the master and servants are one family, the fate of the one depends on that of the other. Taxation ruins us. What fine fellows

our farmers are! In the cultivation of the land they are unequalled."

Madame Martin confessed that she would not have thought it. It was only in Lombardy that she had seen fields well cultivated and well watered. Tuscany looked to her like a beautiful neglected orchard.

The Prince replied smiling that perhaps she might alter her opinion if she were to do him the honour of visiting his farms at Casentino, in spite of their having suffered from long and ruinous lawsuits. There she would see the true Italian peasant.

"I pay great attention to my estate. I was coming from it this evening when I had the double pleasure of meeting at the station, Miss Bell, who was claiming her treasure, and you, Madame, who were talking to a friend from Paris."

He had thought that he might annoy her by speaking of this meeting. Looking round the table he noticed the expression of grieved surprise which Dechartre had been unable to conceal. He insisted:

"Pardon a country person who flatters himself on possessing a certain social discrimination, Madame; but I saw that the gentleman talking to you must be a Parisian, because of his English air, and his affectation of English stiffness which only served to display the ease and vivacity of the Frenchman."

"Oh!" said Thérèse carelessly, "I had not seen him for a long while. And I was very surprised to meet him at Florence just as he was going away."

She looked at Dechartre who pretended not to be listening.

"But I know the gentleman," said Miss Bell. "It was M. Le Ménil. I sat next to him at dinner twice, at Madame Martin's, and he talked very well. He

told me he liked football, that he had introduced it into France, and that now it is very fashionable. He also told me about his hunting. He is very fond of animals. I notice that sportsmen are always fond of animals. I assure you, darling, that M. Le Ménil can talk delightfully of hares. He knows their habits. He told me it was charming to see them dancing by moonlight in the heather. He assured me that they are very intelligent, and that he had seen an old hare, pursued by dogs, forcing another hare out of its hiding-place, in order to put them off the track. Darling, has M. Le Ménil ever talked to you about hares?"

Thérèse replied that she did not remember. She thought sportsmen were always bores.

Miss Bell replied that she did not believe M. Le Ménil could bore any one when he described hares dancing by moonlight in the vines and the heather. Like Phanion, she would like to train a little hare.

"Don't you know Phanion, darling? I am sure M. Dechartre knows her. She was beautiful and beloved of poets. She lived in the Island of Cos, in a house on the side of a hill, covered with lemon and terebinth trees, and on the shore of a blue sea. It is said that she used to gaze at the blue waves. I told Phanion's story to M. Le Ménil, and he was very pleased with it. A hunter had given her a leveret, taken from the mother when she was still feeding it. Phanion took it in her lap and gave it spring flowers to eat. It loved Phanion and forgot its mother. It died of eating too many flowers. Phanion mourned over it. She buried it in the garden, beneath the lemon-trees in a grave, which she could see from her bed. And the poet's singing consoled the shade of the leveret."

Kind Madame Marmet said that M. Le Ménil had a discretion and a charm of manner seldom met with in the young men of the present day. She would have liked to see him. She wanted to ask him to do her a service.

"It is on behalf of my nephew," she said. "He is an artillery captain, well thought of and very popular with his superior officers. His colonel has for some time been attached to M. Le Ménil's uncle, General de La Briche. If M. Le Ménil would be so kind as to ask his uncle to write a few lines recommending my nephew to Colonel Faure, I should be very grateful to him. Besides, M. Le Ménil knows my nephew. They met last year at Caen, at the fancy dress ball given at the Hôtel d'Angleterre, by Captain de Lessay to the officers of the garrison and the young men of the neighbourhood."

Looking down, Madame Marmet added:

"The women there were of course not in society, but I heard that some were very pretty. Many had been brought from Paris. My nephew, who told me about it, was dressed as a postillion; M. Le Ménil as one of the Black Hussars; * he was a great success."

Miss Bell said she regretted not having known that M. Le Ménil was at Florence. She would have liked to invite him to come to Fiesole.

Dechartre was gloomy and distracted for the rest of the evening. And, when they parted, Thérèse noticed that he did not press her hand.

* A cavalry regiment founded by Frederick the Great; the sabres of these hussars were engraved with a skull and two cross bones.—W. S.

XXIII

HE next day when they met in the little house in the Via Alfieri, she found him anxious. At first, by an exuberance of gaiety, by the charm of her tenderness and by the proud humility of a mistress who offers her beauty, she tried to dispel his melancholy. But he continued depressed. All night long he had been thinking and pondering and reflecting on his sorrow and his distress. His mind discerned a relation between the hand posting the letter in front of the bronze San Marco and the commonplace but menacing stranger seen at the railway station. Now Jacques Dechartre had a name for his anguish. An army of dark fancies assailed him as he sat, at Thérèse's invitation, in the grandmother's chair she had occupied on the day of her first happy coming. She meanwhile leant upon his arm and pressed against it her soft figure and her warm, loving heart. The cause of his sorrow she knew too well to ask.

Trying to suggest pleasant thoughts she reminded him of the secrets that room enclosed and of their walks through the city. She lavished upon him all the graces of intimacy.

"You remember that little spoon you gave me under the Lanzi, with the red lily for a handle," she

said. "I use it every morning for my tea. When I awake, the delight I feel at the sight of it tells me how much I love you."

Then, when he answered in sad mysterious words, she said:

"I am here at your side, and you are not thinking of me. You are occupied with some idea of which I am ignorant. Nevertheless, I exist, and your idea is nothing."

"An idea is nothing? Do you think so? An idea can render us happy or miserable. An idea can kill us or make us live. Yes, I am thinking . . ."

"Of what are you thinking?"

"Why do you ask me? You know. I am thinking of what I heard yesterday, of what you have concealed from me—I am thinking of a meeting yesterday, at the station. It was not the result of chance, but had been arranged by a letter posted—do you remember?—in the letter-box of Or San Michele. Oh! I don't reproach you. I haven't the right. But why did you become mine, if you were not free?"

She thought it best to lie.

"If you mean the person I met at the station yesterday I assure you it was a meeting of no consequence."

He noticed sorrowfully that she dared not name him of whom she spoke. He also avoided pronouncing his name.

"Thérèse, did he not come here to see you? Did you not know that he was at Florence? Is he nothing more to you than a man you meet in society and receive in your own home? Was it not on his account that you said to me on the Arno bank: 'I cannot!' Is he nothing to you?"

She replied resolutely:

"Sometimes he comes to see me. General Larivière introduced him. I have nothing else to tell you. I assure you that he does not interest me in the slightest, and that I cannot think what you are imagining."

It gave her a kind of pleasure thus to deny the man who had so violently and so sternly asserted his rights over her. But she hastened to be frank once more. With her beautiful soft serious eyes she looked at her lover and said:

"Listen: from the day when I became yours my life has belonged to you entirely. If you have a doubt, a single anxiety, question me. The present is yours and yours only, you know. As for my past, if you knew how empty it was you would be happy. I cannot think that any woman, made for love as I am, could have brought you a heart more completely yours. That I swear to you. During the years before I knew you, I did not live. Don't let us talk of them. There is nothing in them of which I need be ashamed. Regret! that is another matter. I regret having known you so late. Why, did you not come earlier my love? Five years ago I would have given myself to you as willingly as to-day. But do not let us question the years that are past. Remember Lohengrin. If you love me, I am your Knight of the Swan. I have asked you nothing. I have wanted to know nothing. I have not reproached you with Mademoiselle Jeanne Tancrède. I saw that you loved me, that you were in trouble; and that was enough, because I loved you."

"A woman can't be jealous like a man, nor can she feel what causes us the sharpest agony."

'I don't know. Why not?"

"Why? Because in the blood, in the flesh of a

woman there is not that ridiculous yet noble desire for possession, that ancient instinct which man claims as his right. Man is a god whose creature must be his alone. From time immemorial woman has shared her possessions. Our passions have their roots in the past, the obscure past. When we are born we are already old. For a woman jealousy is merely the wounding of her self-love. In man it is an agony with all the acuteness of mental suffering and all the persistence of physical pain. . . . You ask why? Because, in spite of my submissiveness and my respect, in spite of the fear with which you inspire me, you are matter, I am thought, you are the chattel, I am the soul, you are the clay, I am the potter. Oh, you need not complain. What is the rude and humble potter by the side of the rounded amphora bewreathed with garlands? She is calm and beautiful. He is miserable. He is in torture: he wills and he suffers; for to will is to suffer. Yes I am jealous. I know what my jealousy is. When I analyse it, I find it compounded of hereditary prejudice, savage pride, diseased sensibility, a mingling of stupid violence and cruel weakness, foolish and wicked rebellion against the laws of life and the universe. But it is useless for me to contemplate it in all its nakedness: it is and it tortures me. I am the chemist, who studying the properties of the acid he has drunk, knows with what bases it can combine and what salts it can form. But the acid meanwhile is burning him and will burn him to the marrow of his bones."

"My love, you are absurd."

"Yes, I am absurd. I know it better than you. To desire a woman in the flower of her beauty and her intelligence, mistress of herself, who knows and

dares and is in that all the most beautiful and desirable, who can choose with insight, free and unfettered; to desire her, to love her for all that she is and to suffer because she possesses neither the childish candour nor the pale innocence which would shock one in her, if it were possible to find them; to ask her to be at once herself and not herself, to adore her for what life has made her and yet to regret bitterly that life, which has made her so beautiful, should have even touched her. Oh! it is absurd. I love you, do you understand, I love you with all that you bring me of sensations and habits, with all that your experience has taught you, with all that may even come from him, from them, how can I tell? . . . This is my delight, this is my agony. There must be some profound meaning in that popular imbecility which regards love as a crime. Joy when it is intense is a crime. That is why I suffer, my beloved."

She knelt before him, took his hands, and drew him to her.

"I cannot bear to see you suffer and I cannot let you. It would be madness. I love you, and I have never loved any but you. You may believe me, I am speaking the truth."

He kissed her on the forehead. "If you were deceiving me, darling, I should bear you no ill-will for it. On the contrary I should be grateful. What can be more lawful, more human than to deceive sorrow? What would become of us if women did not take pity and lie? Yes, lie, my beloved, lie in all charity. Give me the dream which shall gladden the night of my sorrow. Lie fearlessly; you will but add one more illusion to that of love and beauty."

He sighed:

"Oh! for common sense, for common wisdom!"

She asked him what he meant by common wisdom. He replied that it was a wise but a brutal proverb and that he had better not repeat it.

"Tell me," she said.

"You really want me to tell you: 'The mouth that is kissed keeps its freshness.'"

And he added:

"It is true that love preserves beauty, and that a woman feeds on caresses as a bee feeds on flowers."

"I swear to you," she replied, "that I have never loved but you. No caresses have preserved any beauty I may be so fortunate as to have to offer you. I love you. I swear I love only you."

And she sealed her oath with a kiss on his lips.

But he remembered the Or San Michele letter and the stranger at the railway station.

"If you really loved me you would not love any one else."

She rose indignant.

"Then you think that I love another? But what you say is horrible. That's what you think of me. And then you say that you love me. . . . I pity you; you are mad."

"Yes, I am mad. Say so. Say so again."

Kneeling at his feet she took his face in her soft hands. She told him he was mad to trouble so much about an insignificant meeting. She made him believe her, or rather she induced him to forget. He saw, he knew, he felt nothing but those slight hands, those burning lips, that eager mouth, that heaving breast and all those charms that were his. His only thought was to lose himself in her. His wrath and bitterness vanished; and there remained the keen desire to forget everything and make her forget

everything in a voluptuous unconsciousness. Goaded by anxiety and desire, she showed the passion she aroused; she realised at once her power and her weakness, inspired by the half unconscious will to give more of herself than ever, she gave love for love with an instinctive ardour she had never experienced before.

In the warm shaded room, the sun's golden beams were falling on the hems of the curtains, and the basket of strawberries beside a bottle of Asti wine on the table. By the bedside, there was a smile on the faded lips of the Venetian lady's clearly outlined form. On the screens the Bergamo and Verona masks laughed joyously in silence. A full blown rose in a glass was dropping its leaves one by one. The silence was redolent of love; they sank down weary with passion.

She fell asleep on her lover's breast. Her pleasure continued in her light slumber. When she opened her eyes, she said, joyfully:

"I love you."

With his elbow on the pillow, he was looking at her in dumb anguish.

She asked him why he was sad.

"You were so happy a few minutes ago. Why aren't you now?"

But he shook his head and did not speak:

"Do say. I would rather hear you complain than that you should be silent."

Then he said:

"You want to know. Then do not be angry. My grief is greater than ever, because now I know what you can give."

She drew away quickly, her eyes full of sorrow and reproach.

"Can you think that I have ever been to another what I am to you! You wound my most tender feeling, my love for you. I cannot forgive you. I love you. I have never loved another. You alone have caused me to suffer. Be happy. You wound me to the quick. . . . Can you be cruel?"

"Thérèse, when one loves one is never kind."

Sitting on the bed, with her legs hanging down, like a bather's, she remained long motionless and lost in thought. A blush spread over her face, which had been pale with passion, and tears filled her eyes.

"Thérèse, you are crying."

"Forgive me, dear. It is the first time I have loved and been really loved. I am afraid."

XXIV

IN the Villa of Bells there was heard the heavy thud of trunks being brought down the staircase. Pauline loaded with bundles was tripping down the steps. Kind Madame Marmet with calm solicitude was watching the despatch of the luggage; and Miss Bell was dressing in her room. Thérèse in a grey travelling gown was leaning against the balustrade of the terrace, and taking one last look at the City of the Flower.

She had decided to go. In every letter her husband clamoured for her return. If, as he urgently entreated, she returned to Paris early in May, they might give two or three political dinners, followed by receptions, before the Grand Prix. His party was being borne into power on a wave of public opinion; and Garain thought that Countess Martin's *salon* might exercise an excellent influence on the country's future. Such reasons did not appeal strongly to her; but now she felt kindly disposed towards her husband, and wished to please him. Two days before she had heard from her father. M. Montessuy did not discuss his son-in-law's political projects, neither did he give advice to his daughter; but he contrived to let her understand that people were talking about Countess Martin's

mysterious visit to Florence, where she was said to be leading a somewhat fantastic, sentimental existence, with poets and artists at the Villa of Bells. She herself felt that she was too closely watched in the little world of Fiesole. In her new life, Madame Marmet worried her, and Prince Albertinelli caused her anxiety. Her *rendezvous* in the Via Alfieri were becoming dangerous and difficult. Professor Arrighi, a friend of the Prince, had met her one evening, walking in a lonely street, on Dechartre's arm. Professor Arrighi, author of a treatise on agriculture, was the most amiable of scholars. He had turned away his handsome heroic face, with its white moustache, and merely remarked to her the next day:

"I used to be able to divine the approach of a beautiful woman from a distance. Now that I have passed the age when ladies like to look at me, the gods are pitiful: they spare me the sight of them. My eyes are very bad, and cannot recognise even the most charming face." She understood and accepted the warning. She now longed to hide her happiness in the immensity of Paris.

Vivian, to whom she had announced her approaching departure, had urged her to stay a few days longer. But Thérèse suspected that her friend was still shocked at the advice she had received one night in the tapestried room, and that she was no longer quite happy in the society of a confidant who disapproved of her choice; she imagined also that the Prince had represented her as a flirt, and, possibly, as immoral. Her departure was fixed for the 5th of May.

It was a clear bright day in the valley of the Arno. Thérèse, as she dreamed, saw the blue basin

illumined by the morning's rosy light. She leant forward, trying to descry, at the foot of the flower covered slope, the barely discernible spot, where she had known infinite joy. Far below, she saw a little dark spot which was the cemetery garden and near at hand she knew was the Via Alfieri. There came before her a vision of that dear room she would never again enter. Those hours passed beyond recall had all the sadness of a dream. She felt her eyes grow dim, her knees tremble, and her spirit fail. She seemed to be leaving her life behind in that spot near the dark cypress-trees. She reproached herself with feeling troubled when she ought to be glad and confident. She knew she would see Jacques Dechartre at Paris. They would have liked to arrive at the same time, or rather to travel together. Although they had judged it best for him to stay three or four days longer at Florence, their meeting was not far off, already it was fixed and she was living in the thought of it. Her love was her life, her very flesh and blood. Nevertheless she was leaving a part of herself in the house of goats and nymphs, a part of herself which would never come back to her. In the height of life's vigour she was dying to things infinitely precious and delicate. She remembered that Dechartre had said: "The lover is a fetich worshipper; on the terrace I gathered some dry black privet berries that you had looked at." Why had she not thought of bringing away one little stone of the house where she had forgotten the world?

A cry from Pauline disturbed her revery. Bounding from behind a brown bush, Choulette had suddenly kissed the maid as she was carrying bags and cloaks to the carriage. Now he was running

along the path as gay as a satyr, with ears pricked up horn-like on each side of his shining skull.

"Good-morning," he said to Countess Martin. "So I must bid you farewell, Madame."

He was remaining in Italy at the behest of a lady; that lady was Rome. He wanted to see the cardinals. One of them, said to be a man of sense, might possibly entertain the idea of Choulette's socialist and revolutionary church. His object was to plant on the ruins of a cruel and unjust civilisation the cross of Calvary, no longer bare and dead, but alive and sheltering the world beneath its living arms. For the accomplishment of his purpose he was founding an order and a newspaper. Madame Martin knew the order. The newspaper, which was to cost a halfpenny, would be couched in rhythmic phrases and plaintive lines. It could and should be sung. Verse, if it were very simple, passionate or gay, was really the only language suitable for the people. Prose was only for persons of subtle intelligence. He had met anarchists among the money-changers of the Rue Saint-Jacques. They passed their evenings reciting and listening to ballads.

And he added:

"A newspaper which should be a collection of songs would appeal to the heart of the people. They say I am a genius. I don't know whether they are right. But at least you must admit that I have a practical mind."

Miss Bell was coming down the steps, putting on her gloves.

"Oh! darling, the town and the mountains and the sky are determined to make you weep when you bid them good-bye. They clothe themselves in

beauty to-day to make you regret leaving them and long to see them again."

But Choulette, weary of the parched brilliance of the Tuscan landscape, pined for green Umbria and its cloudy sky. He remembered Assisi standing as if at prayer, in her fertile pasture, in the midst of a mellower humbler country.

"There," he said, "are woods and rocks, and glades, above which may be seen the sky with white, fleecy clouds. I walked in the footsteps of St. Francis, and I put his hymn to the Sun into good old simple French rhymes."

Madame Martin said she would like to hear it. Miss Bell was listening already, and on her face was a rapt expression, which made her look like one of Mino's angels.

Choulette warned them that it was artless and unpolished. The lines laid no claim to be beautiful. They were simple and unequal, so as not to be heavy. Then slowly and in a monotonous voice, he recited the hymn.

Je vous louerai, mon Dieu, d'avoir fait aimable et clair
Ce monde où vous voulez que nous attendions de vivre.
Vous l'avez semé d'or, d'émeraude et d'outremer,
Comme un peintre qui met des peintures dans un livre.

Je vous louerai d'avoir créé le seigneur Soleil,
Qui luit à tout le monde, et de l'avoir voulu faire
Aussi beau qu'il est bon, très digne de vous, vermeil,
Splendide et rayonnant, en forme exacte de sphère.

Je vous louerai, mon Dieu, pour notre frère le Vent,
Pour notre sœur la Lune et pour nos sœurs les Etoiles,
Et d'avoir au ciel bleu mis le nuage mouvant
Et tendu les vapeurs du matin comme des toiles.

Je vous louerai, Seigneur, je vous bénirai, mon Dieu,
Pour le brin de l'hysope et le cime de l'yeuse,

Pour mon frère terrible et plein de bonté, le Feu,
Et pour l'Eau, notre sœur humble, chaste et précieuse.

Pour la Terre qui, forte, à son sein vêtu de fleurs,
Nourrit la mère avec l'enfant riant dans les langes,
Et l'homme qui vous aime, et le pauvre dont les pleurs
Au sortir de ses yeux vous sont portés par les anges.

Pour notre sœur la Vie et pour notre sœur la Mort,
Je vous louerai, Seigneur, d'ores à mon ultime heure,
Afin d'être en mourant le nourrisson qui s'endort
Dans la belle vesprée et pour une aube meilleure." *

"Oh! Monsieur Choulette," said Miss Bell, "this hymn ascends to heaven, like the hermit in the Campo Santo at Pisa, who is climbing the mountain on which goats love to graze. I will tell you how it is: the hermit is going up, leaning on the staff of faith; and his step is unequal, because the stick being on one side, one of his feet moves more

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* Here follow the Italian original and Mrs. Oliphant's translation, from her "Life of St. Francis of Assisi," 1868, the latter by kind permission of Messrs. Macmillan.—W. S.

1

Altissimu, onnipotente, bon signore,
Tue so le laude la gloria e l'onore
E onne benedictione,
A te solu, altissimu, se konfanno:
E nullu homo ene dignu te mentovare.

2

Laudatu si, mi signore,
Cum tucte le tue creature
Spetialmente messer lu frate sole,
Lu quale lu iorno allumeni per nui;
E ellu è bellu e radiante cum grande splendore;
De te, altissimu, porta significatione.

quickly than the other. That is why your lines are unequal. Oh! I understand."

The poet accepted this praise, persuaded that unconsciously he had deserved it.

"You have faith, Monsieur Choulette," said Thérèse. "What good does it do you if it doesn't help you to write good verses?"

"It helps me to sin, Madame."

"Oh! We can sin without it."

Madame Marmet appeared, ready for the journey. With placid pleasure she was looking forward to returning to her little flat in the Rue de la Chaise, her little dog Toby, and her old friend M. Lagrange. After the Etruscans of Fiesole, she would be glad to see her own domestic warrior among the sweetmeat boxes, looking out of the window across the Place du Bon Marché.

Miss Bell drove her friends to the station in her trap.

3

Laudatu si, mi signore, per sora luna e le stelle;
In celu l'ai formate clarite e pretiose e belle.

4

Laudatu si, mi signore, per frate ventu
E per aere e nubilo e sereno e onne tempu,
Per le quale a le tue creature dài sustentamentu.

5

Laudatu si, mi signore, per sor aqua,
La quale è multo utile e humele e pretiosa e casta.

6

Laudatu si, mi signore,
Per frate focu, per lu quale n'allumeni la nocte;
E ellu è bellu e iocondu e robustosu e forte.

7

Laudatu si, mi signore, per sora nostra matre terra,
La quale ne sustenta e governa
E produce diversi fructi e colorati flori e herba.

8

Laudatu si, mi signore,
Per quilli ke perdonano per lo tuo amore
E sostengo infirmitate e tribulatione:
Beati quilli ke le sosterrano in pace,
Ka da te, altissimu, sirano incoronati.

9

Laudatu si, mi signore, per sora nostra morte corporale,
Da la quale nullu homo vivente po skampare:
Guai a quilli ke morrano in peccato mortale;
Beati quilli ke se trovarà ne le tue sanctissime voluntate,
Ka la morte secunda non li poterà far male:

10

Laudate e benedicete lu mi signore e rengratiate
E servite a lui cum grande humilitate.

Amen.

THE CANTICLE OF THE SUN, OR THE SONG OF THE CREATURES.

Highest omnipotent good Lord,
Glory and honour to Thy name adored,
And praise and every blessing—
Of everything Thou art the source—
No man is worthy to pronounce Thy name.

Praised by His creatures all,
Praised be the Lord my God,
By Messer Sun, my brother above all,
Who by his rays lights us and lights the day;
Radiant is she with his great splendour stored,
Thy glory, Lord, confessing.

By Sister Moon and Stars my Lord is praised,
Where clear and fair they in the heavens are raised.

By Brother Wind, my Lord, Thy praise is said,
By air and clouds and the blue sky o'erhead,
By which Thy creatures all are kept and fed,
By one most humble, useful, precious, chaste,
By Sister Water, O my Lord, Thou art praised.

And praisëd is my Lord
By Brother Fire,—he who lights up the night—
Jocund, robust is he, and strong and bright.

Praised art Thou, my Lord, by Mother Earth—
Thou who sustainest her and governest,
And to her flowers, fruit, herbs, dost colour give and birth.

And praisëd is my Lord
By those who, for Thy love, can pardon give,
And bear the weakness and the wrongs of men,
Blessed are those who suffer thus in peace,
By Thee, the Highest, to be crowned in Heaven.

Praised by our Sister Death, my Lord, art Thou,
From whom no living man escapes.
Who die in mortal sin have mortal woe;
But blessed they who die doing Thy will,—
The second death can strike at them no blow.
Praises and thanks and blessing to my Master be,
Serve ye Him all with great humility.

XXV

ECHARTRE had come to the carriage door to bid the travellers goodbye. Parted from him, Thérèse realised all he was to her: he had given her life a new and delicious zest, so keen, so real, that she seemed to feel the savour of it on her lips. She was living as if under a spell, in the hope of seeing him again; her happy revery was only occasionally broken, when Madame Marmet remarked during the journey: "I think we are crossing the frontier" or "Look at the rose-trees in bloom on the seashore." Her inward joy remained with her when, after a night in a Marseilles hotel, she saw the grey olive trees in their stony fields, then the mulberry trees and the distant outline of Mount Pilatus, and the Rhone, and Lyons, and then the familiar country, the tops of the clusters of trees, recently dark and violet, now clothed in tender green, the hill slopes carpeted with little lines of cultivated land, and the rows of poplars along the river banks. The journey passed smoothly for her. She was tasting the fulness of past hours and the wonder of deep joy. When the train stopped in the blue light of the station, it was with the smile of an awakened sleeper that she

greeted her husband, delighted to see her back. Kissing kind Madame Marmet, she told her she thanked her with all her heart. And truly, she thanked everything, like Choulette's St. Francis.

In the carriage, driving along the quays in the glow of the setting sun, she listened patiently to her husband's story of his oratorical successes, the plans of his party, his own projects and hopes, and the necessity of giving two or three big political dinners. She closed her eyes to think better. She said to herself: "I shall have a letter to-morrow; and I shall see him again in a week." When the carriage had crossed the bridge, she looked at the water all on fire with the reflection of the sunset, at the smoky arches of the bridge, the rows of plane-trees and the chestnut-trees in flower in the quincunxes of Cours-la-Reine; all these familiar sights wore a new loveliness in her eyes. It seemed as if her love had given a new colour to the universe. And she asked herself if the stones and trees recognised her. She was wondering how it was that her silence, her eyes, her very flesh, and the sky and the earth did not cry out her secret. M. Martin-Bellème, thinking she was tired, advised her to rest. And at night, locked in her room, amid a silence so intense that she could hear her heart beat, she wrote her absent lover a letter full of those words which are like flowers in their perennial freshness: "I love you, I wait for you. I am happy. I feel you near me; you and I are alone in the world. From my window I see a twinkling blue star. I look at it and think that you also may be gazing at it from Florence. I have put the spoon with its red lily handle on my table. Come. I long for you from afar. Come!" And thus she found ever new in her heart those thoughts and sensations which are eternal.

For a week she lived this inner life, in the sweet memory of days in the Via Alfieri, feeling still the impression of kisses she had received and loving herself because another loved her. She employed the greatest care and the most delicate taste in ordering her new dresses. In this she pleased and aimed at pleasing herself. Madly anxious when there was nothing for her at the post office, trembling and glad when there was handed to her from behind the counter an envelope on which she recognised the round elaborate writing of her lover. Memories, desires, and hopes devoured her; and thus the ardent hours passed quickly by.

It was only the morning of the day of his arrival that seemed to her hatefully long. She was at the station before the train was due. It was announced to be late, and she felt crushed. An optimist, and like her father, believing that fate must always be on her side, this unforeseen delay seemed to her like treachery. For three-quarters of an hour, the grey light filtering through the dull windows of the station seemed to fall on her like so many grains of sand in an hour-glass, measuring out the minutes of her lost happiness. She was despairing, when in the red light of the setting sun she saw the huge engine stop gently at the platform. Jacques, tall and slim, came towards her out of the crowd of travellers hurrying to the cabs. He looked at her with that kind of sombre, violent delight which she knew so well. He said:

"Here you are at last. I was afraid that I should die before seeing you again. You do not know and I did not what torture it is to live a week away from you. I went back to the little house in the Via Alfieri. In the room you know so well,

before the old pastel, I wept tears of love and passion."

She looked up at him full of happiness, and said:

"And don't you think that I called you, that I wanted you, that even when I was alone, I stretched out my arms to you? I had hidden your letters in the cabinet where I keep my jewels. I used to re-read them every night: it was delightful, but it was imprudent. Your letters were too much like you, and yet not enough."

They crossed the station-yard, among the cabs piled with luggage. She asked him if they were not going to hire a carriage.

He did not reply, and seemed not to hear. She resumed:

"I have been to see your house, but I dared not go in. I looked through the gate, and at the end of a court-yard, behind a plane-tree, I saw mullioned windows with rose trees climbing round them. And I said to myself: 'It is there.' I felt strangely moved."

He was no longer listening, or looking at her. They crossed the pavement quickly, and by a narrow flight of steps, went down into a lonely street which flanked the lower side of the station-yard. There, among wooden sheds and stores of coal was an inn with a restaurant on the ground-floor, and tables outside. Under the painted sign, white curtains were to be seen at the windows. Dechartre stopped at the little door and pushed Thérèse into the dark passage.

She asked:

"Where are you taking me? What time is it? I must be at home at half-past seven. We are mad."

And in a red-tiled room, furnished with a walnut bedstead, and a carpet in the pattern of a lion, they tasted one moment's divine oblivion.

Coming downstairs, she said: "Jacques, my beloved, we are too happy; we are stealing life."

XXVI

THE next day she drove in a cab to a street half town, half country, half sad and half gay, where high garden walls alternated with newly built houses. She stopped where the pavement passes under the vaulted arch of a mansion in the Regency style, fantastically spanning the street, now covered with dust and oblivion. Here and there among the stone-work, green branches gladden this corner of the town.

As she rang at the little gate, in the perspective limited by the houses, Thérèse saw a pulley on a skylight and a big gilded key, the sign of a lock-maker. Her glance eagerly drank in these sights which were new to her and yet already familiar. Pigeons flew over her head, and she heard the clucking of fowls. A countrified servant with a military moustache opened the gate. She found herself in a sanded court, shaded by a plane-tree. On the left, on a level with the street, was the porter's lodge, with canaries in cages at the windows. On this side, was the gable of the next house, covered with a green lattice-work. Leaning against it was the glazed frame of a sculptor's studio, through the glass of which could be seen plaster figures covered with dust. On the right, fixed to the low wall of the court, were precious fragments of friezes and the broken shafts of columns. In front were the six

mullioned windows of the moderate sized houses, half hidden by ivy and climbing roses.

Enamoured of French fifteenth-century architecture, Philippe Dechartre had skilfully reproduced the characteristics of a private dwelling in the reign of Louis XII. Begun in the middle of the Second Empire, this house had never been finished. The builder of so many châteaux had died before completing his own shanty. It was better thus. It had been designed in a style which once had an air of distinction, but now appeared common and old-fashioned. The gardens that had once surrounded it had been gradually built up. And to-day, cramped between the walls of high buildings, Philippe Dechartre's little mansion corrected the bad taste of its sham antiquity and its archæological romanticism by the pathos of its rough-hewn stone crumbling away in expectation of the mason, dead for perhaps twenty years, by the heaviness of its three incomplete dormer windows, by the simplicity of the inexpensive roof provided by the architect's widow, and by all the charm of the unfinished and the involuntary. Thus it harmonised better with that ugliness of the neighbourhood which resulted from the rapid increase of the population.

After all, the house had a certain charm with its tumble-down air and its drapery of green. Suddenly and instinctively, Thérèse discovered other harmonies. In that picturesque neglect, revealed by the ivy-covered walls, the darkened studio windows, and even by the bending plane tree, strewing with its scaled bark the grass of the court, she read the soul of the master, careless, spendthrift, bearing within him the eternal discontent of the passionate. For a moment her joy was clouded as she realised the

indifference with which her lover treated his surroundings. Although united to a kind of grace and nobility, it betrayed a detachment according ill with her own nature and the vigilant careful spirit of the Montessuy. She thought at once how, without disturbing the pensive charm of this wild place, she would introduce into it a spirit of order: she would have the path strewn with sand, and in the corner where there was most sun would plant some bright coloured flowers. Sympathetically she gazed at a statue brought there from some ruined park. It was a Flora, covered with dark green moss and lying on the ground, her two arms by her side. Thérèse dreamed of raising her and making her the centrepiece for the fountain, the waters of which were now trickling sadly into the bucket acting in lieu of a basin.

Dechartre had been looking for her for an hour. Now he was glad, but still anxious. Trembling with agitation at his good fortune, he came down the steps to meet her.

In the refreshing shade of the vestibule, from which could be vaguely descried the severe beauty of bronzes and marbles, she paused, overcome by her heart's wild beating.

He pressed her to him and gave her a long kiss. Through her emotion she heard him recalling the delights of the previous day. She saw the lion of Mount Atlas on the rug, and slowly and passionately she gave Jacques back his kisses.

Up a winding wooden staircase, he led her into a large room, which had been his father's study, and where he himself drew, modelled and read. Reading was a kind of opium to him, inspiring him with dreams over the open page.

Over the cupboards and reaching to the painted beams of the ceiling was Gothic tapestry, delicately tinted, suggesting a fairy forest, and a lady wearing a high fifteenth-century head-dress, with a unicorn at her feet on the flower-strewn grass.

He led her to a divan broad and low, with cushions covered with sumptuous Spanish shawls and Byzantine dalmatics; but she sat down in an armchair.

"You are here! Now the world may come to an end."

"I used to think of the end of the world and not to fear it," she replied. "M. Lagrange out of politeness had promised me it should come; and I expected it. It was so dull before I knew you!"

She looked round at the tables loaded with vases and statuettes, at the tapestry, the mass of glittering weapons, the enamels, marbles, paintings, and old books.

"You have some beautiful things."

"Most of them belonged to my father, who lived in the golden age of collectors. In 1851 he discovered these unicorn stories, the complete series of which is at Cluny, in an inn at Meung-sur-Yèvre."

But curious and disappointed, she said:

"I don't see anything by you, here; not a statue, a low-relief, or one of those wax figures so admired in England, not one tiny statuette, or even a plaque or a medal."

"How can you think I could bear to live in the midst of my own works! . . . I know my figures only too well. . . . They bore me. A thing loses its charm when you know its secret."

She looked at him, pretending to be vexed:

"You never told me that a thing loses its charm when you know its secret."

He took her in his arms:

"Ah! all that lives is mysterious. And you, my beloved, are for me an unsolved enigma, the meaning of which is the delight of life and the horror of death. Don't fear to be mine. I shall desire you always; I shall never know you. Does one ever possess what one loves? Are kisses and caresses anything but the strivings of a delicious despair? When I hold you in my arms, I still long for you; and I never have you, since I would have you always, since what I want in you is the impossible and the infinite. What you are the gods only know. Do you think that because I have modelled a few indifferent figures I am a sculptor? I am rather a kind of a poet and philosopher seeking in nature subjects which shall agitate and torment me. Feeling for form does not satisfy me. My fellow sculptors laugh at me because I cannot be as simple as they. They are right. And that brute Choulette is right too when he would have us live without thought or desire. Our friend, the cobbler of Santa Maria Novella, who knows nought of all that would render him unjust or unfortunate, is a master in the art of life. I ought to love you in all simplicity without those metaphysics of passion which render me absurd and unkind. The only good thing is to ignore and forget. Come, come, in the torture of our separation I have had cruel thoughts of you: come, my beloved. You yourself must drown these thoughts of you. It is through you only that I can forget you and myself."

He took her in his arms, and, raising her veil, kissed her on the lips.

She pulled the black tulle over her face, rather frightened in this strange big room and feeling embarrassed by the presence of unfamiliar objects.

"Here!" she said; "surely you are not thinking."

He said that they were alone.

"Alone? But what about the man with the terrible moustache who opened the door to me?"

He smiled:

"That is Fusellier, my father's old servant. His wife and he compose my household. Don't be alarmed. They stay quietly in their lodge, sullen but faithful. You will see Madame Fusellier. She is familiar, I warn you."

"Why, my love, should a butler and porter like M. Fusellier wear a Tartar's moustache?"

"Nature gave it him, darling, and I would not deprive him of it. I am pleased that he should look like a retired sergeant-major turned nurseryman, for at times he inspires me with the illusion that he is my country neighbour."

Sitting on one corner of the divan, he drew her on to his knee and gave her kisses which she returned.

Then she rose quickly, saying:

"Show me the other rooms. I am curious. I want to see everything."

He took her to the second floor. Water colours by Philippe Dechartre hung upon the walls of the corridor. He opened a door and showed her into a room with ebony furniture.

It was his mother's room. He kept it just as it had been in her lifetime. It looked as if it had been used but yesterday; and it is only yesterday's past that really touches and saddens us. Although it was nine years since it had been used, the room seemed not yet to have resigned itself to solitude.

The wardrobe mirror was watching for the old lady's glance, and on the onyx clock a pensive Sappho looked disappointed as she listened for the sound of the swinging pendulum.

There were two portraits on the walls. One, by Ricard, was of Philippe Dechartre, very pale, with tumbled hair, his eyes lost in romantic dreams, his mouth full of eloquence and good nature. The other, painted by a surer hand, was of a lady of uncertain age, thin, with an eager air and almost beautiful.

"My poor mother's room is like me," said Jacques: "it remembers."

"You are like your mother," said Thérèse. "You have her eyes. Paul Vence told me she adored you."

"Yes," he replied, smiling, "mother was delightful: intelligent, with excellent taste, but wonderfully absurd. In her maternal affection almost amounted to madness; she never left me a moment's peace; she tormented herself and me."

Thérèse was looking at a bronze by Carpeaux, on a cabinet.

Said Dechartre: "You recognise the Prince Imperial, by his ears like wings in the statues of Zephyrus, enlivening a somewhat cold countenance. This bronze was a gift from Napoleon III. My parents used to visit Compiègne. Whilst the court was at Fontainebleau, my father took a plan of the château and drew the gallery. In the morning the Emperor would come in his frock-coat, smoking a meerschaum pipe, and pose near him, like a penguin on a rock. At that time I was a day pupil at the Lycée Bonaparte. I used to listen to these stories at meals; and I have never forgotten them. The

Emperor would stay there, quite calm and good-tempered, occasionally breaking the long silence by a few words, stifled beneath his heavy moustache. Then he would grow slightly animated and explain his ideas on machinery. He was an inventor and an engineer. He would take a pencil from his pocket, and, to my father's despair, draw figures on his plans. Two or three sketches a week were regularly spoiled in this manner. . . . He was very fond of my father and promised him employment and honours that never came. The Emperor was kind, but he had no influence, as mother used to say. I was a lad at that time. And ever since those days I have felt a vague sympathy for that man lacking genius, but with a heart kind and good, who amidst all life's vicissitudes conducted himself with a simple courage and a good-tempered fatalism. . . .

"And then, I sympathise with him also, because he was opposed and insulted by those who wanted to take his place and who hadn't even his love for the people. Since then we have seen them in power. Ye Gods! What villains! Senator Loyer, for example, who in the smoking-room, at your house, was stuffing cigars into his pocket, and inviting me to do so too. 'To smoke on the way home,' he said. This Loyer is a wicked man, one who is hard on the weak, the humble, and the unfortunate. And Garain, doesn't he disgust you? You remember my first dinner at your house, when we talked of Napoleon. Your hair was beautifully coiled in the nape of your neck in a knot pierced by a diamond arrow. Paul Vence talked subtly. Garain did not understand. You asked what I thought."

"It was because I wanted you to shine. I was proud of you already."

"Oh! I should never have been able to utter a single sentence in the presence of such serious people. Nevertheless I should have liked to say that the third Napoleon appealed to me more than the first, and that I thought him more human. But perhaps such a sentiment would have been badly received. Besides, I am not so utterly devoid of talent as to trouble about politics."

He was walking round the room and looking at the furniture with a tender affection. He opened a drawer in the bureau:

"See, here are my mother's spectacles. How often she looked for them! Now I am going to show you my room. If it is not in order, you must forgive Madame Fusellier, who has orders to respect my untidiness."

The window curtains were drawn and he let them remain so. An hour later, she herself drew aside the folds of red satin. The rays of light dazzled her eyes and scattered themselves in her tumbled hair. She looked for a glass and found only a tarnished Venetian mirror in an ebony frame. Standing on tip-toe so as to see herself, she asked:

"Is that dim shadowy spectre really I? Those who have been reflected in this glass can hardly have congratulated you on it."

As she was taking her pins from the table, she saw a little bronze she had not noticed before. It was a piece of old Italian work in the Flemish style: a heavy, nude, short-legged figure of a woman, as if in flight, with arms extended. She thought it a trifle grotesque and vulgar.

"What is she doing?" she asked.

"She is doing what Madame Mondanité is doing under the porch of the Bâle Cathedral."

But Thérèse, although she had been to Bâle, did not know Madame Mondanité. She looked at the little bronze again, but failed to understand, and asked:

"Can it be so improper? I should have thought anything done under a church porch might be talked of here."

Then suddenly a misgiving occurred to her:

"Good gracious! What would M. and Madame Fusellier think of me?"

Then discovering on the wall a medallion by Dechartre, representing the interesting but vicious profile of a little street girl, she asked:

"What is that?"

"That is Clara, a little newspaper-seller of the Rue Demours. She used to bring me the *Figaro* every morning. She had dimples on her cheeks that were nests for kisses. One day I said to her: 'I will draw your portrait.' She came one summer morning wearing earrings and rings bought at the Neuilly fair. Then I never saw her again. I don't know what has become of her. She was too much a creature of instinct ever to become a regular prostitute. Shall I take it away?"

"No, it looks very well in that corner. I am not jealous of Clara."

It was time for her to go home; but she couldn't make up her mind to leave him. She put her arms round her lover's neck.

"Oh! I love you. And to-day you have been gay and light-hearted. Gaiety becomes you well. Yours is so sparkling and graceful. I should like you to be always gay. I want joy almost as much as love, and who will give it me if not you?"

XXVII

INCE her return to Paris, now six weeks ago, Thérèse had been living as if in a slumber; and happy dreams had taken the place of conscious thought. Every day she met Jacques in the little house overshadowed by the plane-tree; and when at last she tore herself away, adorable memories lingered in her heart. Delicious languor and renewed desire linked the hours of love together. They both had the same tastes and were possessed by the same fancies. If one had a whim the other shared it. Together they delighted to explore that border region on the outskirts of the town. There the streets and purple painted taverns are shaded by acacias. Thistles grow on the stony roads along the bottom of the walls, while over fields and woods extends a pale sky streaked with smoke from the factory chimneys. She was glad to feel him near her in a country where she ceased to recognise herself and felt lost with him.

That day, their whim had been to take the boat she had so often seen passing beneath her windows. She was not afraid of being recognised. There was no great danger; and since she had been in love, she had forgotten to be prudent. Leaving behind the dusty barrenness of the suburbs, they came upon smiling banks; they passed islands with clumps of trees overshadowing rustic cafés and innumerable boats moored beneath the willows. They landed at

Lower Meudon. She said she was hot and thirsty. He took her by a side door into a tavern, where there were furnished rooms to let. It was a building surrounded by wooden galleries. In its desertion it appeared larger than usual and seemed to slumber in rustic peace, waiting till Sunday should fill it with women's laughter, oarsmen's cries, the smell of cooking and stench of fried fish.

They went up the ladder-like creaking stairs into a room on the first floor, where a waitress brought them wine and biscuits. Woolen curtains covered a mahogany bedstead. Over the mantelpiece, fixed across one corner, was inclined an oval mirror in a flowered frame. Through the open window could be seen the Seine, with its green banks, and hills in the distance, looking misty in the heat and the sun already inclining towards the tops of the poplar trees. Swarms of gnats were dancing by the river. The quivering peace of a summer evening alike pervaded sky, earth, and water.

Long did Thérèse watch the flowing river. The steamer passed, pounding its screw through the water; and the swell lapping on the shore seemed to make the house on the bank roll like the boat.

"I love the water," said Thérèse, turning to her lover. "How happy I am!"

Their lips met.

Lost in the enchanted abyss of love, the passing of time was unmarked for them save every ten minutes, after the passing of the boat, by the ripple of the waves breaking beneath the open window.

Her clothes carelessly thrown on one side strewed the floor. She lifted her head from the pillow and saw herself in the glass. To Dechartre's loving praise she replied:

"It is true I am made for love."

With sensitive immodesty she contemplated her own image in the silver light of the mirror.

"I love myself because you love me."

Certainly he loved her; and he could not explain to himself why his love was a fervent pity, a kind of sacred passion. It was not on account of her beauty, so rare and so infinitely precious. Her figure had the true lines, but line follows motion and is always fleeting; it is lost and is found again, the joy and the despair of artists. A beautiful line is the lightning which burns the eye while rejoicing it. One admires but one is also overwhelmed. The impulse of love and desire is a sweet and terrible force, stronger than beauty. There is one woman in a thousand, whom when you have once possessed you can never leave; you desire her always and for ever. The flower of her beauty is the cause of this incurable malady of love. But there is another and inexplicable cause; it is the soul of her body. She was that woman, who can be neither abandoned nor deceived.

"Ah! you cannot leave me," she cried joyfully.

She asked him why since he thought her beautiful he did not model her bust.

"Why? Because I am but a second-rate sculptor. But I know it and that is not to be second-rate. However, if you insist on regarding me as a great artist I will give you other reasons. To create a living figure you must treat your model as mere matter to be pounded and moulded until it distils the very essence of its beauty. But in you everything is dear to me, your form, your flesh, your whole self. If I were to do your bust I should be serviley attentive to trifles, which are everything for

me, because they are something of you. I could not help it, and it would prevent my work from arriving at any unity."

She looked at him a little surprised.

He resumed:

"I do not say that it would be so if I were to work from memory. I have attempted a little pencil sketch, that I always carry with me."

As she insisted on seeing it, he showed it to her. It was on the leaf of an album, a very bold, simple sketch. She did not recognise it, thought it hard, with an expression that seemed foreign to her.

"Ah! is that how you see me, is that the impression I make on you?"

He closed the album.

"No, it is merely a reminder, a note, that's all. But I think the note is correct. Probably you don't see yourself quite as I see you. Every human being has a different personality for every one who looks at him."

With a kind of forced gaiety, he added:

"From that point of view one may say that the same woman has never been the mistress of two men. That is Paul Vence's idea."

"I think it true," said Thérèse.

"What time is it?" she asked.

It was seven o'clock. She said they must go. Every evening she was later going home. Her husband had noticed it. He had said: "We are always the last to arrive at a dinner-party; there is a fatality about it." But he himself was frequently late, being detained at the Palais-Bourbon. The budget was under discussion; and he was absorbed by the duties of the sub-committee on which he had

been appointed reporter. And so reasons of state covered Thérèse's unpunctuality.

With a smile she recalled the evening when she had reached Madame Garain's at half-past eight. She was afraid her hostess would be annoyed. But it was the day of a famous question in the Chamber, and her husband and Garain did not arrive till nine o'clock, when they both dined without waiting to dress. They had saved the ministry.

Suddenly she became thoughtful.

"I shall have no excuse, my love, for remaining in Paris when the Chamber is adjourned. Already Father can't understand the devotion that keeps me here. In a week I must join him at Dinard. What shall I do without you?"

She clasped her hands and looked at him with a sadness that was infinitely tender. But he said gloomily:

"It is I, Thérèse, I who must wonder anxiously what will become of me without you. When you leave me I am besieged by sorrowful imaginings; black thoughts come and sit in a circle around me."

She asked what those thoughts were.

He replied:

"My beloved, I have told you already: you yourself must make me forget you. When you are gone, the memory of you will torture me. I must pay for the happiness you give me."

XXVIII

IN the bay, terminating in two promontories like horns of gold, with here and there a rose-coloured reef, the blue sea was languidly rolling its silver fringe on to the fine sand of the beach. The day was so bright that the sunlight on Chateaubriand's tomb might make one imagine oneself in Greece. In a room full of flowers, with a balcony looking on the myrtles and tamarisks of the garden and the ocean beyond, with its islands and promontories, sat Thérèse. She was reading the letters she had fetched that morning from the St. Malo post office. On the boat crowded with passengers she had not liked to open them. Immediately after lunch, she had shut herself in her room. There, with her letters spread out on her lap, she was eagerly reading, and greedily tasting her furtive joy. At two o'clock she had to go for a coach-drive with her father, her husband, Princess Seniavine, Madame Berthier d'Eyzelles, the deputy's wife and Madame Raymond, the wife of an Academician. That day she had two letters. The first she read was full of gladness and the delicate savour of love. Jacques had never appeared gayer, simpler, happier, more charming.

Since he had loved her, he said, his feet had moved so lightly and so swiftly that they hardly touched

the ground. He had only one fear, and that was that he was dreaming and should awake to find he did not know her. Yes, he must be dreaming. But what a dream! the little house in the Via Alfieri, the inn at Meudon! Their kisses, and those divine shoulders, that supple form, fresh and fragrant as a stream flowing among flowers. If he were not dreaming, then he must be intoxicated. Fortunately his reason had left him; and he saw her in her absence: "Yes, I see you near me. I see your heavy lashes shading those eyes more delightful than all the blue in flowers and sky, your lips like a delicious fruit, your cheeks with two adorable dimples when you laugh. I see you beautiful and desirable, but fleeting, vanishing. And when I open my arms you have gone. I see you in the distance far away, on the long yellow sand, no bigger than a spray of heather in flower, beneath your sunshade, in your pink gown. You appear as tiny as when I saw you from the top of the Campanile, on the Piazza del Duomo at Florence. And I say to myself as I said that day: 'One blade of grass would hide her from me completely, and yet she is to me the infinite of joy and sorrow.' "

All he complained of was the torture of her absence. But with his complaints mingled the glad happiness of love. He threatened to come and surprise her at Dinard. "Don't be afraid. I shall not be recognised. I shall be disguised as a hawker of plaster casts; and I shall not belie myself. Dressed in a grey blouse and coarse cotton trousers, my face and beard covered with white dust, I shall ring at the Villa Montessuy. You, Thérèse, will recognise me by the statuettes on the plank I bear on my head. They will all be Cupids. There will be

Faithful Cupid, Jealous Cupid, Tender Cupid, Ardent Cupid; and the ardent Cupids will be the most numerous. And I shall cry in the rude sonorous tongue of the Pisan or Florentine artisan: *Tutti gli Amori per la signora Teresina.*"

The last page of this letter was tender and thoughtful. There escaped from it reverent effusions, reminding Thérèse of the prayer books she used to read when a child. "I love you, and I love everything in you: the earth on which you walk so lightly and which you render beautiful, the light which enables me to see you, and the air you breathe. I love the bending plane-tree in my courtyard because you have seen it. To-night I walked along the avenue where I met you one winter evening. I gathered a sprig of box that you had looked at. I see you and you only in this city which does not contain you."

When he had finished his letter he wrote, he would go out to lunch. The saucepan had upset in the absence of Madame Fusellier, who on the previous day had gone to her native town, Nevers. He would go to a favourite tavern in the Rue Royale. And there, lost in the crowd, he would be alone with her.

Soothed by the charm of invisible caresses, Thérèse closed her eyes and leant back in her armchair. Hearing the sound of the coach stopping at the door, she opened the second letter. The altered writing, the uneven lines, the disordered appearance of the pages made her anxious.

The mysterious beginning betrayed a sudden anguish of mind and dark suspicion. "Thérèse, Thérèse, why were you ever mine if you could not give your whole self? Your deception has done

me no good, since now I know what I was determined not to know."

She paused in her reading and her eyes grew dim. "We were so happy just now," she thought. "What has happened? And I was rejoicing in his gladness when it had ceased to exist! It would be better not to write, since letters only express feelings that have passed away, ideas that are no more."

She read on. Seeing that he was devoured by jealousy, she despaired.

"If I have not proved to him that I love him with all my strength, with all my soul, how can I ever convince him?"

And she hastened on to see what had caused this sudden madness. Jacques told her:

As he was lunching at a tavern in the Rue Royale, he met an old friend, who was passing through Paris on his way from an inland watering-place to the seaside. They began to talk; and it chanced that this man, who moved much in society, spoke of Countess Martin, whom he knew. Jacques interrupted his narrative to exclaim:

"Thérèse, Thérèse, what use was it for you to lie to me since one day I must know that of which I alone was ignorant? But the mistake was more mine than yours. Your letter posted in the box at Or San Michele, your meeting at the Florence station should have told me, if only I had not so obstinately clung to my illusions, in spite of evidence. I refused to know you were another's when you were giving yourself to me with that bold grace, that charming voluptuousness which will kill me. I willingly remained in ignorance. I ceased to ask you for an explanation out of fear lest you should find yourself unable to lie. I was so prudent that

it remained for a fool to open my eyes suddenly and brutally and bring it home to me at a restaurant table. Oh! now that I know, now that I can no longer doubt, it seems to me that doubting was delicious. He uttered the name, that name I had heard already at Fiesole, on the lips of Miss Bell, and he added: 'The story is well known.'

"So you loved him, you still love him. And when, alone in my room, I am biting the pillow on which your head reclined, perhaps he is with you. Doubtless he is. He always goes to the Dinard races; so I have been told. I see him. I see everything. If you knew the sights that haunt me, you would say: 'He is mad,' and you would pity me. Oh! how I wish I could forget you and everything. But I cannot. You know that you alone can make me forget you. I am always seeing you with him. It is torture. That night on the Arno's bank, I thought myself unhappy. But then I did not even know what suffering meant. To-day I know."

As she finished the letter, Thérèse thought: "A chance word has thrown him into this state of agitation. One word sufficed to make him mad with despair." She wondered who the wretch was who had uttered it. She suspected two or three young men whom Le Ménil had introduced to her, warning her to beware of them. And in a passion of wrath, of the cold severe kind, inherited from her father, she said to herself: "I shall know. Meanwhile what must she do? Her lover was ill, despairing, wild with grief; and yet she could not hasten to his side, to embrace him and throw herself into his arms with so complete an abandonment of soul and body as would convince him she was his entirely and compel him to believe in her. She could

write. But how much better it would have been to go, and silently nestle near his heart, and then afterwards say: "Now dare to think I am not yours alone." But she could only write. She had hardly begun her letter, when she heard voices and laughter in the garden. Already Princess Seniavine was climbing up the ladder on to the coach.

Thérèse went down and appeared on the steps tranquil and smiling; her broad straw hat trimmed with poppies cast a becoming shadow over her face and her bright grey eyes.

"Good heavens! how pretty she is!" cried Princess Seniavine. "And what a pity we see her so seldom! In the morning she crosses the ferry and goes into the narrow streets of Saint-Malo; in the afternoon she shuts herself in her room. She avoids us."

The coach wound round the wide circle of the beach, past villas and terraced gardens on the side of the hill. And on the left were to be seen, as if emerging from the blue sea, the steeple and ramparts of Saint-Malo. Then the coach passed into a road bordered with gay hedgerows, along which were walking women from Dinard, with figures upright and broad winged cambric caps.

"It is unfortunate," said Madame Raymond, who was on the box by Montessuy, "that the old costumes are dying out. Railways are responsible for it."

"True," said Montessuy, "if it were not for railways, the peasants would still be wearing their old picturesque costumes; but we should not see them."

"What does that matter?" replied Madame Raymond. "We should imagine them."

"But," asked Princess Seniavine, "do you ever see anything interesting? I never do."

Madame Raymond, who had acquired a smattering of philosophy from her husband's books, maintained that things were nothing and ideas everything.

Without looking at Madame Berthier d'Eyzelles sitting on her right on the back seat, Countess Martin murmured:

"Oh! yes, people only regard their own ideas; they refuse to be guided by anything else. Blindly and deafly they go on. Nothing can stop them."

"But, my dear," said Count Martin, who was sitting in front of her, by the Princess, "without such guiding ideas, one would simply drift. . . . By-the-by, Montessuy, have you read Loyer's speech at the unveiling of Cadet-Gassicourt's statue? The opening is remarkable. Loyer is not lacking in sound political common sense."

Having crossed the willow bordered meadows, the coach climbed the hill, and came on to a vast wooded plateau. For some time it followed a park wall. Away in front the road disappeared out of sight in the damp mist.

"Is this Le Guerric?" asked Princess Seniavine.

Suddenly, between two stone pillars surmounted by lions, there came before them a closed gate crowned by four ornaments in wrought iron. Through the bars, at the end of a long avenue of limes, could be seen the grey walls of the château.

"Yes," said Montessuy, "it is Le Guerric."

And, turning to Thérèse, he said:

"You know the Marquis of Ré. . . . At sixty-five he had all the vigour of youth. He set the

fashion, was the arbiter of good taste, and always popular. Young men used to copy his frock-coat, his eye-glass, his gestures, his captivating insolence and his entertaining fancies. Suddenly he withdrew from society, shut up his house, sold his horses, and vanished. You remember, Thérèse, his sudden disappearance? It was soon after you were married. He used often to call and see you. One day we heard that he had left Paris. In the midst of winter he had come down here to Le Guerric. We all wondered what had caused this sudden retreat. We thought he must have suffered some annoyance. Perhaps he had fled in the humiliation of his first failure, afraid lest he should be seen to grow old. Old age was what he most dreaded. The truth is that for six years he has been living in retirement. Not once has he left his château and his park. At Le Guerric he entertains two or three old men, who were the companions of his youth. That gate opens for them only. He has never been seen since his disappearance from Paris; he will never be seen again. He is now as persistent in his retirement as he was formerly in his sociability. He could not bear his decline to be observed. He is dead though alive. It seems to me not in the least despicable."

Thérèse remembered the charming old man who had wished to possess her as the glorious conclusion of his life of gallantry; and she turned round to look at Le Guerric, at the greyish tops of its oak-trees, and its four sentry-box turrets.

On the way home, she said she had a headache, and could not come down to dinner. She shut herself in her room and took the sad letter out of her jewel-case. She re-read the last page:

"At the thought that you are another's my heart

is rent and consumed. And then I cannot bear that other to be he."

It was an obsession. Three times on the same page he had written:

"I cannot bear that other to be he."

She also was possessed by but one idea: she must not lose him. She would have said anything, done anything, not to lose him. She sat down, and in an outburst of passion, tender and pathetic, wrote a letter, in which over and over again she repeated like a groan: "I love you, I love you, I have never loved any one but you. You are alone, alone, alone, do you understand? Alone in my heart, alone in me. Don't listen to that wretch. Listen to me. I swear to you I loved no one, no one before you."

While she was writing, the indistinct, vague sighing of the sea accompanied the heaving of her breast. She wanted to write and believed she was writing the truth; and all she said was sincere with the sincerity of her love. She heard her father's firm heavy step on the stairs. She hid her letter and opened the door. Montessuy coaxingly asked if she were better.

"I came to wish you good-night and to ask you something," he said. "I shall probably see Le Ménil at the races to-morrow. He always goes, and he is a man of regular habits. If I meet him, dear, do you mind my inviting him to come and spend a few days here? Your husband thinks you would be pleased to see him. He might have the blue room."

"As you like. But I would rather you kept the blue room for Paul Vence, who very much wants to come. It is possible too that Choulette may come without sending us word. It is just like him. We

shall see him one morning ringing at our gate like a beggar. My husband is mistaken when he thinks I like Le Ménil. Besides, next week I must go to Paris for a few days."

XXIX

WENTY-FOUR hours after writing her letter, Thérèse arrived from Dinard at Dechartre's little house at Les Ternes.* She had had no difficulty in finding an excuse for going to Paris. She had travelled with her husband, who wished to visit his constituency, undermined by socialists, in the department of Aisne. In the morning she surprised Jacques in his studio, as he was outlining a big figure of Florence, on the banks of the Arno, weeping over her ancient glory.

The model was posing, seated on a very high stool. She was a tall dark girl. The glare from the window accentuated the clear lines of her hip and thigh, the hardness of her face, her dark neck and yellow skin, the veins on her breast, the muscles of her knees and feet, the toes of which overlapped. Thérèse looked curiously at her, realising the beauty of her form, in spite of neglect and emaciation.

Dechartre, with his chisel and his pellet of clay in hand, came to meet Thérèse with a sad affectionate air which touched her. Then, putting the clay and the instrument on the edge of the easel and

* A district of Paris between the Avenue de la Grande Armée and the Boulevard Malesherbes.—W. S.

covering the figure with a damp cloth, he said to the model:

"That is enough for to-day, my girl."

Then she rose, awkwardly gathered together her clothes, a mere handful of dark woollen stuff and soiled linen, and went behind the screen to dress.

Meanwhile the sculptor washed his hands, whitened by the clinging clay, in a green earthenware basin. Then he went out of the studio with Thérèse.

They passed beneath the plane-tree. The scales from its trunk were strewing the sand of the courtyard.

She said:

"You don't think so any longer, do you?"

He took her to his room.

Her letter from Dinard had already partly corrected his painful impression. It had come at the very moment when, worn out with suffering, he needed calm and tenderness. A few lines in writing had appeased his anguish. His was a soul that fed on images, that was less sensitive to things than to symbols of things. But there was still a painful twist in his heart.

In the room everything seemed on her side: the furniture, the curtains, the rugs spoke of love. She murmured sweet words:

"But how could you believe it? . . . Don't you know what you are? . . . It was madness! . . . How could a woman who has known you tolerate any one else?"

"But before?"

"Before, I was waiting for you."

"And wasn't he at the Dinard races?"

She did not think so; and it was perfectly certain

that she wasn't there—horses and horsey men bored her.

"Jacques, you are like no one else and need fear no one."

On the contrary he realised his own insignificance; he knew that the individual counts for little in a world where persons are like corn and chaff united or winnowed by one movement of the fan in the hand of a rustic or of a god. But the regular measured motion of the material or of the mystic fan prevents the metaphor from being strictly applied to life. Men seemed to him more like beans in the trough of a coffee-mill. The fact had been brought home to him two days before as he watched Madame Fusellier grinding her coffee.

"Why have you no pride?" Thérèse asked him.

She said little; but she spoke with her eyes, her arms, and her breath, as her breast rose and fell.

In the glad surprise of seeing and hearing her, he allowed himself to be persuaded.

She asked him who had spoken those hateful words.

There was no reason why he should not tell her. It was Daniel Salomon.

She was not surprised. Daniel Salomon, who was said to be incapable of being any woman's lover, at least wished to be intimate with all, and to know their secrets. She guessed why he had spoken thus.

"Jacques, don't be angry at what I am going to say: you are not very clever at disguising your feelings. He suspected that you loved me; and he wanted to make sure. I am certain that he no longer has any doubts concerning our relations; but I don't mind that. On the contrary if you were a

better deceiver, I should be less easy. I should think that you did not love me enough."

She changed the subject quickly, afraid of making him anxious.

"I didn't tell you how delighted I was with your figure. Florence on the Arno bank! That is you and I."

"Yes, into that figure I have put all the ardour of my love. It is sad, and I want it to be beautiful. Do you see, Thérèse, that beauty is sorrowful. That is why I have suffered since my life became beautiful."

He felt in the pocket of his flannel coat and took out his cigarette-case. But she urged him to dress. She would take him home to lunch. They would spend the whole day together. It would be delightful.

She looked at him with childlike joy. Then she grew sad, remembering that at the end of the week she must return to Dinard, and afterwards go to Joinville, and that all that time they would be parted.

She would ask her father to invite him to Joinville for a few days. But they would not be alone and free there as they were in Paris.

"It is true," he said. "Paris in its vague immensity is best for us."

"Even in your absence," he added, "I could not leave Paris. I should hate to live in countries that do not know you. A sky, mountains, trees, springs, statues that could not speak to me of you would have nothing to say to me."

While he dressed she turned over the pages of a book she had found on the table. It was "The Arabian Nights." It was illustrated by prints

of viziers, sultanas, black eunuchs, bazaars, and caravans.

"Do 'The Arabian Nights' amuse you?" she asked.

"Very much," he replied, putting on his tie. "When I like I can believe in those Arabian princes whose legs were turned into black marble, and the women of the harem who haunt cemeteries at night. These stories suggest easy dreams which make me forget life. Yesterday I went to bed very sad, and I read the story of the three one-eyed Calendars."

"You try to forget," she said rather bitterly. "I would not for the world efface the memory of any trouble which came from you."

They went down into the street together. She was to take a cab a little farther on, so as to arrive a few minutes before him.

"My husband expects you to lunch."

On the way they talked of trivialities, which in the light of their love became important and delightful. They planned out their afternoon so as to cram into it as much as possible of the infinitude of deep joy and the delight of cleverly contrived pleasure. She consulted him about her dresses. She could not bring herself to leave him, so happy was she to walk with him down the sunlit streets in the glad cheerfulness of noon. When they reached the avenue of Les Ternes there was a row of provision shops displaying their wares in lavish profusion. Strings of birds at the poulterer's door, boxes of apricots and peaches, baskets of grapes and heaps of pears, at the fruiterer's. Carts full of fruit and flowers blocked up the roadway. In the glass-covered space in front of a restaurant, men and women were having lunch. Among them Thérèse recog-

nised Choulette, sitting alone at a little table by an oleander in a tub, lighting his pipe.

Having seen her, he haughtily threw a five-franc piece on to the table, rose and took off his hat. He was very grave; and his long frock-coat gave him an austere and decorous air.

He said he would have liked to have gone to see Madame Martin at Dinard. But the Marchioness of Rieu had kept him in Vendée. Meanwhile he had published a new edition of the *Jardin Clos*, to which he had added the *Verger of Sainte Claire*. He had touched hearts that had been thought hard, and made streams flow from rocks.

"So," he said, "I have been a kind of Moses."

He felt in his pocket, and took out of his pocket-book a dirty crumpled letter.

"This is what Madame Raymond, the Academician's wife, writes. I am publishing her words because they do her credit."

And, unfolding the thin sheets, he read:

"I have called my husband's attention to your book; and he cried: 'This is pure mysticism! Here is a walled garden, which I think, among its lilies and white roses, must have a little door leading into the road to the Academy.'"

Having tasted to the full the savour of these words mingled with the fumes of brandy, Choulette carefully put back the letter into his pocket-book.

Madame Martin congratulated the poet on being Madame Raymond's candidate.

"You would be mine, Monsieur Choulette, if I troubled about elections to the Academy. But do you really want to become a member?"

For a few moments he was solemnly silent. Then he said:

"Madame, I am on my way to confer with various well-known persons in the political and religious world, who live at Neuilly. The Marchioness of Rieu is urging me to stand in her neighbourhood as candidate for a seat in the Senate, which has fallen vacant through the death of an old man, who, it is said, was a general while he lived this life of illusion. I am going to the Boulevard Bineau to consult priests, women, and children on this matter —O Eternal Wisdom! The constituency, whose support I shall solicit, is situated in an undulating, wooded country, with fields bordered by pollarded willows. In the hollow of one of these willows is sometimes found a *chouan's* skeleton, still holding his gun, with a rosary between his fleshless fingers. My profession of faith shall be pasted on the oak-trees' bark. This shall be my manifesto: 'Peace for the priests' houses! May the day come when the bishops, with wooden croziers, may be like unto the poorest curate of the poorest parish! It was the bishops who crucified Jesus Christ. Their names were Annas and Caïaphas. And they still bear those names before the Son of God. Now, while they were nailing Him to the Cross, I was the good thief, at His side.' "

He pointed with his stick towards Neuilly:

"Dechartre, my friend, is not that the Boulevard Bineau, from which the dust is rising down there on the right?"

"Good-bye, Monsieur Choulette," said Thérèse. "Don't forget me when you are a senator."

"Madame, I remember you in all my prayers, both at matins and vespers. And I say to God: 'Since in Thy wrath, Thou hast given her wealth and beauty, look upon her in mercy, O Lord, and

deal with her according to Thy great loving kindness.' "

And limping stiffly, he went away down the crowded avenue.

XXX

HÉRÈSE, wrapped in a pink cloth mantle, was coming down the steps with Dechartre. He had arrived at Joinville that morning. She had planned that he should join the small circle of intimate friends, before the hunting season began; for she was afraid that Le Ménil, of whom she had heard nothing, would then be invited as usual. The soft September air blew through the curls of her hair, and the declining sun made her dark grey eyes glitter with sparks of gold. Behind them the façade of the château displayed busts of Roman emperors on high pedestals in the spaces between the windows, above the three arcades of the ground floor. The main building was flanked by two high wings raised still higher by extravagant Ionic pillars supporting their great slate roofs. This style was characteristic of the architect Leveau. In 1650 he had planned the château of Joinville-sur-Oise for that rich Mareuilles, who was the creature of Mazarin and the fortunate accomplice of Surintendant * Fouquet.

Thérèse and Jacques saw before them the flower-beds arranged in great semicircles designed by Le Nôtre, the green lawn and the fountain; then the grotto with its five rustic arches, its giants' heads

* The King's chief financial minister.

terminating in columns, and its big trees tinted already with autumn colours of purple and gold.

"All the same," said Dechartre, "these geometrical figures in flowers and foliage have their beauty."

"Yes," said Thérèse, "but I am thinking of a plane-tree bending over a grass-grown court-yard. We will plant flowers in it, and put up a beautiful fountain, won't we?"

Leaning against one of the stone lions, with almost human faces, which guarded the filled up moat at the bottom of the steps, she turned round to the château, and, looking at one of the dormer windows, in the guise of an open dragon's mouth, above the cornice, she said:

"That is your room: I went up there yesterday evening. On the same story on the other side, right at the end of the passage, is papa's study. A white deal table, a mahogany desk, a water-bottle on the mantelpiece: his study at it was when he was a young man. Our fortune was made in it."

Walking down the sanded garden paths they came to the trim box hedge, bordering the park on its southern side. They passed in front of the orangery, the monumental door of which was surmounted by Mareuilles's Lorraine cross, and they entered the lime walk on one side of the green lawn. Under the trees half stripped of their leaves, statues of nymphs seemed to shiver in the damp shade, streaked with pale rays of light. A pigeon, perched on the shoulder of one of these white women, took flight. From time to time a dry leaf, detached by a gust of wind, fluttered down, and lay like a shell of reddish gold holding a raindrop. Thérèse pointed to the nymph and said:

"She watched me when I was a child and longed to die. I was distressed by fear and desire. I was waiting for you. But you were so far away."

At a point where several paths met the lime-tree walk was interrupted. A lake was there. In its centre was a group of Tritons and sea-nymphs, blowing into shells—forming, when the fountain was at work, a diadem of water with flourishes of foam.

"That is the Joinville crown," she said.

She showed him a path, beginning at the lake and leading into the country, towards the rising sun.

"That is my path. How often have I walked down it sorrowfully. I was sad before I knew you."

They continued in the walk, which, with other limes and other nymphs, went on beyond the lake. They followed it as far as the grottos. Situated at the end of the park, the grottos were a semicircle of rock-work huts, surmounted by balusters, and separated by statues of giants. One of these statues, at one corner of the grotto, towered over it in its huge nakedness and seemed to look down upon it with a stony glance at once fierce and benevolent.

"When my father bought Joinville," she said, "the grottos were a mere mass of ruins overgrown with grass and full of vipers. Thousands of rabbits had burrowed in them. He restored the statues and arches according to Perelle's prints in the National Library. He was his own architect."

A desire for shade and retirement led them to a pleached walk at the side of the grottos. But a sound of footsteps coming from the covered walk made them pause a moment. And through the leaves they saw Montessuy with his arm round Princess Seniavine. They were quietly walking

towards the château. Jacques and Thérèse, hidden by a great statue, waited till they had passed. Then she said to Dechartre, who was looking at her in silence:

"This is too much! Now I understand why Princess Seniavine asked papa's advice when she bought her horses last winter."

Nevertheless Thérèse could not help admiring her father for having won this beautiful woman, who was considered difficult to please, and was known to be rich in spite of occasional embarrassments resulting from her spendthrift habits. She asked Jacques if he did not think the Princess very beautiful.

He recognised that she possessed a certain distinction; but her charms were too sensuous for him. She was beautiful doubtless, but in her swarthy beauty he detected a smear of the tar-brush, a negroid strain.

Thérèse replied that it was possible, but that nevertheless, in the evening, Princess Seniavine threw every other woman into the shade.

At the back of the grottos, she took Jacques up moss-grown steps leading to the Sheaf of Oise, formed by a clump of leaden reeds in the middle of a basin of pink marble. There towered the tall trees which shut in the park and marked the beginning of the wood. They passed into the forest. They were silent amidst the faint rustling of the leaves. Beyond the magnificent curtain of elms stretched thickets of aspen trees and birches, the silver bark of which glittered in the last rays of the setting sun.

He held her tightly in his arms and rained kisses on her eyelids. Night came down; the earliest

stars were twinkling among the branches. The croaking of frogs was heard in the damp grass. They went no farther.

When in the darkness she turned back with him towards the castle, there remained on her lips a taste of kisses and of mint, and in her eyes the vision of her lover, who, standing by the trunk of a willow seemed like a faun, while she in his arms, with her hands clasped round his neck, swooned with voluptuous delight. As she passed beneath the lime-trees, she smiled at the nymphs who had seen her childhood's tears. In the sky Cygnus was displaying his cross of stars, and the moon was reflecting her delicate horn in the basin of the lake. The insects in the grass were singing songs of love. Turning the last corner of the box hedge, Thérèse and Jacques perceived, black and menacing, the triple mass of the château, and through the great bow-windows of the ground-floor they discerned forms moving in the red light. The bell was ringing.

"I have only just time to dress for dinner," cried Thérèse.

And in front of the stone lions she escaped from her lover, vanishing quickly like a vision in a fairy tale.

In the drawing-room after dinner, M. Berthier d'Eyzelles was reading a newspaper, and Princess Seniavine was playing patience at the card-table. Thérèse, her eyes half-closed over a book, feeling still the prickling at her ankles of the thorns which had scratched her among the brushwood, was recalling with a shudder how her lover had taken her in the woods, like a faun playing with a nymph. The Princess asked if her book were amusing.

"I don't know. I was dreaming while I read. Paul Vence was right: 'It is only ourselves that we find in books.' "

Through the curtains could be heard the stacatto tones of the players and the clashing of balls in the billiard-room.

"I have done it!" cried the Princess, throwing away her cards.

That day she had put a big sum on a horse at the Chantilly races.

Thérèse said she had had a letter from Fiesole. Miss Bell announced her approaching marriage with Prince Eusebio Albertinelli della Spina.

The Princess began to laugh: "There's a man who will do her a great service."

"What service?" asked Thérèse.

"Why he will make her disgusted with men."

Montessuy came into the drawing-room, very gay. He had just won.

He sat down by Berthier d'Eyzelles, and taking an unfolded newspaper from the sofa, read:

"At the meeting of the Chamber, the Minister of Finance will bring forward his savings bank bill."

It was a question of authorising savings-banks to lend money to the communes, which would result in depriving the banks that Montessuy directed of their best customers.

"Berthier," asked the financier, "are you resolutely determined to oppose this bill?"

Berthier nodded.

Montessuy, rising, put his hand on the deputy's shoulder.

"My dear Berthier, I have an idea that the ministry will be defeated at the beginning of the session."

He went up to his daughter.

"Le Ménil has written me a strange letter."

Thérèse went and shut the door leading to the billiard-room.

She was afraid of draughts, she said.

"A strange letter," resumed Montessuy. "Le Ménil won't hunt at Joinville. He has bought a yacht of eighty tons, the *Rosebud*. He is yachting in the Mediterranean, and can't live on land. It is a pity. He is about the only man I know who can lead the hunt."

Just at this moment Dechartre came into the drawing-room with Count Martin. After having beaten Dechartre at billiards, the Count became friendly; and he was explaining the dangers of taxation based on household expenses and the number of servants.

XXXI

HE pale winter sunlight shone through the mist from the Seine on to the dogs of Oudry above the dining-room doors.

On Madame Martin's right sat Deputy Garain, ex-Keeper of the Seals, ex-President of the Council, on her left the Senator Loyer. On Count Martin-Bellème's right was M. Berthier d'Eyzelles. A small and serious political luncheon-party. According to Montessuy's prophecy, the ministry had been defeated four days ago. Summoned to the Elysée that very morning, Garain had accepted the task of forming a cabinet. During lunch he was drawing up the list of names to be submitted to the President in the evening.

And, while they were discussing names, Thérèse was recalling the scenes in her secret life.

She had returned to Paris with Count Martin in time for the reassembling of the Chamber, and from that moment she had been living an enchanted life.

Jacques loved her; he loved her with a delightful mingling of passion and tenderness, of knowledge and curiosity. He was nervous, irritable, anxious. But his moody temperament made her appreciate his gaiety all the more. That artistic gaiety, bursting forth suddenly like a flame enhanced love

without ever offending it. And her lover's witty merriment was a constant wonder to Thérèse. She had never imagined possible that perfect grace which he displayed alike in his merry moments and in his more intimate moods. In earlier days his passion had been gloomy and monotonous. That alone had attracted her. But since then she had discovered his overflowing versatile gaiety, the unique grace of his sentiments, his gift of drinking pleasure's draught to the very dregs.

"It is all very well to talk of a homogeneous ministry," cried Garain. "We must come into touch with the tendencies of the various parties."

He was anxious. He felt himself surrounded by all the snares he had laid for others. Even his collaborators he regarded as enemies.

Count Martin wanted the new ministry to gratify the aspirations of the ultra-modern party. "Your list includes persons who differ widely in origin and opinions," he said. "Now perhaps the most important innovation in the political history of the last few years is that it has become possible, I may say necessary, for the government of the Republic to be unanimous. These are the very views, my dear Garain, which you have yourself expressed with such rare eloquence."

M. Berthier d'Eyzelles was silent.

Senator Loyer was crumbling his bread. It was an old habit he had acquired in taverns; and he could think best while cutting corks or rolling crumbs of bread. He raised his pimpled face, fringed with an unkempt beard, and, with sparkling eyes, looking constrainedly at Garain:

"I said so; but no one would believe me. The annihilation of the monarchial right was an irrep-

arable misfortune for the leaders of the republican party. They lost a strong opposition, which is a government's best support. All the measures of the Empire were directed against the Orleanists and against us; the government of the 16th of May was hostile to the Republicans. And we were more fortunate still: we directed all our measures against the Right. And what an excellent opposition the Right was—ominous, candid, weak, vast, honest, unpopular! We ought to have kept it. But we did not. And then, it must be admitted, everything wears out in time. Nevertheless, some kind of opposition is absolutely necessary. To-day only the Socialists can give us that strength which the Right furnished fifteen years ago, with such unfailing generosity. But they are too weak. They must be strengthened, multiplied, and made into a political party. At the present moment that is the first duty of the Minister of the Interior."

Garain, who was not cynical, did not reply.

"Do you know yet, Garain," asked Count Martin, "whether you will be Keeper of the Seals or Minister of the Interior as well as President of the Council?"

Garain replied that his decision depended on the choice made by N——, whom it was necessary to include in the cabinet, and who was hesitating between the two offices. Garain was ready to sacrifice his personal convenience to the public interest.

Senator Loyer was pulling a wry face. He wanted the Seals. He had long cherished this desire. He had been a law tutor under the Empire, and, at café tables, had given highly appreciated lessons. He had a feeling for chicanery. Having laid the foundation of his political fortune by articles

expressed so as to involve him in prosecution, lawsuits, and some weeks in prison, he had henceforth considered the press as a weapon in the hands of the opposition, which should be broken by every good government. Since the 4th of September, 1870, he had dreamed of becoming Keeper of the Seals; he wanted to show people how an old Bohemian, who had served his time in the Ste. Pelagie Prison in Badinguet's days, a law tutor who once expounded the Code while supping off *sauer-kraut* and sauce, could rise to the highest legal appointment.

Dozens of fools had passed him by. He had grown old in the mediocrity of the Senate; dirty, bewitched by a girl he had picked up in a tavern, poor, lazy, disillusioned; his old Jacobinism and his sincere contempt of the people outlived his ambitions and still attached him to the government. Now, having become associated with Garain and his group, he thought justice was about to be done to him. And his patron, who denied it, became an importunate rival. He sneered as he modelled a poodle out of bread-crumbs.

M. Berthier d'Eyzelles, very calm, very grave, very dejected, stroked his white whiskers and said:

"Don't you think you ought to include those in the cabinet who from the very first have adopted the policy towards which we are inclining to-day?"

"It was that course that ruined them," replied Garain impatiently. "A politician should never precede public opinion. It is a mistake to see things too quickly. It is not thinkers that we want in politics. Besides, let us be perfectly frank: if you want a ministry of the left centre, say so, and I withdraw. But I warn you that neither the Chamber nor the country will be with you."

"It is obvious," said Count Martin, "that we must make certain of having a majority."

"If you accept my nominations, then your majority is assured," said Garain. "Our opponents were supported by the minority swelled by the votes that we have won. Gentlemen, I appeal to your public spirit."

And the difficult work of assigning the various offices began again. Count Martin was offered Public Works, which he refused on the ground of incompetence; and then Foreign Affairs, which he accepted without making any objection. But M. Berthier d'Eyzelles, to whom Garain offered Commerce and Agriculture, demurred.

Loyer was sent to the Colonial Office. He seemed chiefly concerned in making his bread-crumb poodle stand up on the tablecloth. Meanwhile, out of the corner of his little eye, from among his wrinkles, he was looking at Countess Martin and admiring her. He was dreaming vaguely of meeting her again some day in private.

Leaving Garain to fend for himself, he devoted his attention to this pretty woman; he tried to discover her tastes and her habits, asked her if she were fond of the theatre and if sometimes her husband took her to cafés in the evening. And Thérèse began to find that, in spite of his dirt, with his ignorance of society and his superb cynicism he was more interesting than the others.

Garain rose. He had still to see N——, N——, and N—— before presenting his list to the President of the Republic. Count Martin offered him his carriage, but Garain had his own.

"Don't you think," asked Count Martin, "that the President may object to certain names?"

"The President," said Garain, "will take into consideration the needs of the hour."

He had already crossed the threshold when he returned, exclaiming:

"We have forgotten the War Minister."

"You will easily find one among the generals," said Count Martin.

"Ah," cried Garain, "do you think the choice of a War Minister so easy? It is obvious that you have not as I have belonged to three cabinets and presided over the council. During my ministries and while I was President, our most insuperable difficulties always came from the Minister of War. All generals are the same. You know the one I appointed when I formed a cabinet. We chose him because he was totally ignorant of politics. He was hardly aware that there were two Chambers. We had to explain to him the whole working of the parliamentary machine; to teach him that there was a war committee, a committee of finance, sub-committees, reporters, a debate on the budget. He asked us to write it all down on half a sheet of note-paper. His ignorance of men and things was alarming. . . . At the end of a fortnight he was familiar with all the tricks of politics, was personally acquainted with all the senators and all the deputies, and was intriguing with them against us. If it had not been for the support of President Grévy, who always mistrusted soldiers, he would have turned us out. And he was a very ordinary general, just like all the rest. Ah! don't think the office of War Minister can be bestowed hastily or without mature reflection. . . ."

And Garain shuddered to think of his former

colleague on the Boulevard St. Germain.* He went out.

Thérèse rose. Senator Loyer offered her his arm with the elegant bow he had learnt at Bullier's forty years ago. She left the politicians in the drawing-room. She was in a hurry to meet Dechartre.

The Seine, the stone quays and the plane-trees with their golden leaves were shrouded in a yellowish brown fog. Over a cloudy sky the red sun was casting the last glories of the year. Thérèse, coming out of doors, delighted in the exhilarating sharpness of the air and the dying splendour of the day. Since her return to Paris she had been so happy that every morning she rejoiced in the changing weather. In her benevolent egoism it seemed as if it were for her that the wind blew through the ragged trees, or that the horizon of avenues became grey in the fine rain, or that the sun dragged its cooled orb across the chilly sky; it was all for her, that she might say when she entered the little house at Les Ternes: "It is windy, it rains, it is a fine day," thus introducing the world of external things into the intimacy of their love. And every dawn seemed beautiful, because the day was to bring her to her lover's arms.

On that day as on every day, as she took her way to the little house at Les Ternes, she was thinking of her unexpected happiness, so complete and, she felt, so secure. She walked in the last glorious sunshine, already threatened by winter, and she was saying to herself:

"He loves me, I think he loves me with all his

*Where the French War Office is situated.—W. S.

heart. To love is easier and more natural for him than for other men. In their lives there is something above them, a faith, habits, or interests. They believe in God, or in duty, or in themselves. He only believes in me. I am his god, his duty, his life."

Then she thought:

"It is true also that he is not dependent on any one, not even on me. His own thoughts are a magnificent world in which he could live easily. But I cannot live without him. What would become of me if I had him no longer?"

She was reassured when she thought of his passionate admiration of her, and the spell she had cast over him. She remembered having said to him one day: "You only love me with a sensual love. I do not complain; perhaps it is the only love that is true." And he had replied: "It is the only love that is great and strong. It has its measure and its weapons. It is full of sense and imagination. It is violent and mysterious. Its object is the body. The rest is but a lie and an illusion." She was almost at rest in her joy. Suspicion, anxiety had vanished like the clouds of a summer storm. Their worst time had been when they were separated from each other. Lovers should never be parted.

At the corner of the Avenue Marceau and the Rue Galilée she half divined, rather than recognised, a shadow—that of a form forgotten, which had passed close to her. She believed and she wished to believe that she was mistaken. He whom she imagined she had seen was no longer, had never been. It was a phantom beheld in the limbo of a former world, in the darkness of a visionary exist-

ence. And she went on, but this uncertain meeting left a coldness, a vague uneasiness, and an ill-defined fear in her heart.

As she went up the avenue she saw the newspaper sellers coming towards her holding out the evening papers with large headlines, announcing the new ministry.

She crossed the Place de l'Etoile, walking hurriedly in the happy impatience of her desire. In her mind's eye she saw Jacques awaiting her at the bottom of the stairs among the nude figures of marble and bronze, taking her in his arms and carrying her, already quivering and faint with kisses, to that shaded room of delight, where the joy of living made her forget life.

But, in the solitude of the Avenue MacMahon, the shadow seen already at the corner of the Rue Galilée, approached and appeared close to her with a lifelike and painful distinctness. She recognised Robert le Ménil, who, having followed her from the Quai de Billy, now joined her in the quietest safest spot.

His air, his attitude indicated that transparency of soul which once had pleased Thérèse. His face, naturally hard, browned by sea and sun, a trifle hollow, very calm, bore traces of deep suffering.

"I must speak to you."

She slackened her step. He walked at her side.

"I have tried to forget you. After what had happened you will agree it was only natural. I did my very best. It would certainly have been better to forget you. But I could not. Then I bought a yacht. For six months I have been at sea. Perhaps you know?"

She signified that she knew.

He resumed:

"The *Rosebud*, a pretty boat of eighty tons. I had a crew of six men. I worked with them. It distracted me."

He was silent. She was walking slowly, saddened but chiefly annoyed. It was utterly absurd and painful for her to listen to this strange talk.

He resumed:

"What I suffered on that yacht I should be ashamed to tell you."

She felt that he was speaking the truth and turned away.

"Oh! I forgive you. When I was alone, I reflected much. Days and nights I passed lying on the divan in the deck-house; over and over again I returned to the same thoughts. During those six months I thought more than I have done in my whole life. Don't laugh. There is nothing like sorrow for opening one's mind. I understood that if I had lost you it was my own fault. I ought to have known how to keep your love. And, lying full length, while the *Rosebud* skimmed over the sea, I said to myself: 'I did not know how to keep her. Oh! if I could begin over again!' By dint of thinking and suffering I came to understand; I understood that I had not sympathised enough with your tastes and ideas. You are an intellectual woman. I didn't notice it, because I didn't love you for that. I unconsciously wounded and irritated you."

She shook her head. He insisted.

"Yes, yes! I often wounded you. I was not considerate enough of your sensitive temperament. There were misunderstandings between us. They arose from our being so different. And then I never knew how to distract you. I never gave you the

kind of pleasures that an intelligent woman like you requires."

He was so simple and sincere in his regrets and his suffering that her heart went out to him. She said gently:

"My friend, I have nothing to complain of in you."

He resumed:

"All that I have just said is true. I understood it in my boat out at sea. The hours I lived through there I would not desire for my greatest enemy. Many a time I thought of jumping overboard. I did not do it. Was it because of religious principles or considerations for my family or lack of courage? I don't know. Perhaps it was because you far away were attracting me to life. I was being drawn to you, therefore I am here. I have been watching you for two days. I would not come to your house. I should not have been able to see you alone. And then you would have been obliged to receive me. I thought it better to speak in the street. The idea came to me on board my yacht. I said to myself: 'In the street if she listens to me it will be because she wishes to, just as she did four years ago, in the park at Joinville, you know, by the statues, near the Crown.'"

And he resumed with a deep sigh:

"Yes, as at Joinville, since we must begin over again. I have been watching you for two days. Yesterday it rained; you drove out. I might have followed and seen where you went. I wanted to; but I didn't. I determined not to do anything that would displease you."

She gave him her hand. "Thank you. I knew I should never regret having confided in you."

Alarmed, impatient, nervous, fearing what he would say next, she tried to break off and to leave him.

"Good-bye! You have life before you. You are happy. Only realize it and cease troubling about what is not worth while."

But he interrupted her with a look. There had come over his face that intense, resolute expression she knew so well.

"I told you I had something to say. Listen for one minute."

She thought of Jacques, who must be expecting her now.

A few rare passers-by looked at her and went on their way. She stopped beneath the branches of the Judas-tree and waited in pity and fear.

"See," he said, "I forgive and I forget. Take me back. I promise never to refer to the past."

She trembled. Her surprise and distress were so evident that he stopped.

Then after a moment's reflection:

"I know that what I propose is unusual. But I have thought it over. It is the only possible thing to do. Consider it, Thérèse, and don't give me an answer at once."

"It would be wrong to deceive you. I cannot and will not agree to what you propose; and you know why."

A cab was passing slowly. She hailed it, and it stopped. He kept her a minute longer.

"I expected you to say that; therefore I say again don't give me an answer at once."

With her hand on the carriage door, she looked at him out of her grey eyes.

It was a sad moment for him. He recalled the

times when he had seen those eyes half closed. He stifled a sob and murmured in a husky voice:

"Listen, I cannot live without you; I love you. Now I really love you. Before I did not know."

And, while she gave the cabman a dressmaker's address, he walked away with a brisk easy gait, which to-day, however, was a little less firm than usual.

This meeting left her anxious and uneasy. If she must see him again, she would have preferred to find him violent and brutal as at Florence.

At the corner of the avenue, she called out to the coachman: "Les Ternes, Rue Demours."

XXXII

IT was Friday at the opera. The curtain had just gone down on Faust's laboratory. Now the orchestra stalls were in movement, opera-glasses were at work surveying the hall of purple and gold beneath the lights far up in the immensity of the roof. Like precious stones in their caskets, the bejewelled heads of the women and their bare shoulders glittered in the dark boxes. Hanging over the pit was the amphitheatre, in one long garland of diamonds, flowers, beautiful hair, dazzling necks and shoulders, gauze and satin. In the front row of the stalls were to be seen the Austrian Ambassadress, and the Duchess of Gladwin; in the amphitheatre, Berthe d'Isigny and Jane Tulle, who had been made famous by the suicide of her lover on the previous day; in the boxes, Madame Bérard de La Malle, with downcast eyes, her long eyelashes shading her finely moulded face; Princess Seniavine, superb, hiding her yawns behind her fan; Madame de Morlaine, between two young married women whom she was educating in the art of being gracefully clever; Madame Meillan, happy in the assurance of thirty years of incomparable beauty; Madame Berthier d'Eyzelles, stiff, with iron-grey hair

loaded with diamonds. Her bad complexion accentuated the severe dignity of her bearing. Every one was looking at her. That morning, it had been reported that after Garain's failure, M. Berthier d'Eyzelles had undertaken to form a cabinet. His task was nearly accomplished. The list of ministers was in the newspapers, and included Martin-Bellème at the Treasury. And opera-glasses were turned uselessly to the Countess's box, which was still empty.

The house resounded with a great murmur of voices. In the third row of the orchestra stalls, General Larivière, standing in his usual place, was talking to General de La Briche.

"I shall soon follow your example, old chap, and retire to grow cabbages in Touraine."

He was in one of those melancholy moods when annihilation seemed the necessary sequence to the rapidly approaching end of life. He had flattered Garain, and Garain, thinking him too clever, had passed him by and appointed a short-sighted faddist, a general of artillery, to be Minister of War. Larivière, however, had the satisfaction of seeing Garain abandoned, betrayed by his friends Berthier d'Eyzelles and Martin-Bellème. The wrinkles round his little eyes were puckered up with laughter. On his crabbed face the crow's-feet seemed to laugh all by themselves. He was laughing only in profile. Weary of a long life of dissimulation, he now suddenly indulged in the joy of expressing his thoughts:

"My good La Briche, they are really too stupid with their civil army which is expensive and useless. Small armies are the only ones that are any good. That was Napoleon's opinion, and he knew."

"It is true, quite true," sighed General de La Briche, moved to tears.

Montessuy passed them on his way to his seat; Larivière held out his hand. "I hear that it was you, Montessuy, who defeated Garain. I congratulate you."

Montessuy protested that he never meddled in politics. He was neither senator, nor deputy, nor even member of the General Council for Oise. And looking at the house through his glass:

"Look, Larivière, in that box on the right, there is a very pretty woman with her hair in flat *bandeaux* coming well over her forehead."

And he took his place, tranquil in the enjoyment of the reality of power.

Meanwhile in the *foyer,* in the passages, and in the house the names of the new ministers were being passed from mouth to mouth with sluggish indifference. President of the Council and Home Secretary, Berthier d'Eyzelles; Minister of Justice and Religion, Loyer; Minister of Finance, Martin-Bellème. All the appointments were known except the Ministers of Commerce, War, and the Fleet, not yet nominated.

The curtain had risen on the tavern of the god Bacchus. The students were singing their second chorus, when Madame Martin appeared in her box, her hair dressed high; her white gown with wing-like sleeves; and over her left breast a great lily in rubies sparkling on her white bodice.

Miss Bell was sitting next her in a Queen Anne gown of green velvet. Engaged to Prince Eusebio Albertinelli della Spina, she had come to Paris to order her trousseau.

In the noise and movement of the throng:

"Darling," said Miss Bell, "at Florence you have left a friend who tenderly cherishes the charm of your memory, Professor Arrighi. He gives you what he considers the highest of all praise: he says that you are a musical being. But how should Professor Arrighi forget, when even the broom brushes in the garden remember you? Their bare branches moan over your absence. Oh! they long for you, darling."

"Tell them," said Thérèse, "that from Fiesole I brought away a delightful memory which is to be my very life."

At the back of the box, M. Martin-Bellème in a low voice was giving his views to Joseph Springer and Duvicquet. He was saying: "The credit of France is the best in the world," and again: "Let us pay off our debt by using our surplus, not by imposing taxes." He was in favour of prudent finance.

And Miss Bell went on:

"I will tell the broom-brushes of Fiesole, that you long for them, darling, that you will soon come back to them on the hill. But, I want to ask you: do you often meet M. Dechartre at Paris? I should so much like to see him again. I like him because he has a distinguished soul. Yes, darling, M. Dechartre's soul is full of grace and distinction."

Thérèse replied that probably M. Dechartre was in the house and that he would not fail to come and see Miss Bell.

The curtain went down on the myriad coloured whirl of a waltz. People pressed into the passage: financiers, artists, deputies, in one moment crowded into the little *salon* adjoining the box. They surrounded M. Martin-Bellème, muttered their con-

gratulations, nodded their compliments over each other's heads, and nearly stifled each other in their efforts to shake hands with him. Joseph Schmoll, coughing and whining, blind and deaf, scornfully pushed his way through the crowd and reached Madame Martin. He took her hand, breathed heavily upon it, and covered it with resounding kisses.

"I hear that your husband has been appointed minister. Is it true?"

She knew it was rumored, but did not think anything was decided yet. But her husband was here. Why not ask him?

Always grasping at literal truth, he said:

"Ah! your husband is not yet a minister? When he is nominated I will ask you for a moment's conversation. It is a matter of the highest importance."

Then he was silent, looking through his gold spectacles, with that glance of the blind man and the visionary, which in spite of the brutal precision of his temperament, surrounded him with a kind of mysticism.

"You have been to Italy this year, Madame?" he asked abruptly. And without giving her time to reply:

"I know, I know. You went to Rome. You looked at that infamous Arch of Titus, that execrable monument bearing among the spoils from Judea the Seven Branched Candlestick. Ah well! Let me tell you, Madame, that the universe should be ashamed of permitting that Arch to remain standing in the city of Rome, where the Popes have only been able to exist by means of the art of the Jews, the silversmiths, and the money-changers. The Jews introduced the science of Greece and of the

East into Italy. Madame, the Renaissance is the work of Israel. That is absolute but unacknowledged truth."

And he went out through the crowded ante-room, treading on the hats which collapsed with a dull thud beneath his heavy footsteps. Meanwhile Princes Seniavine, in front of her box, was looking at her friend through the glass with that curiosity with which now and again the beauty of women inspired her. She signed to Paul Vence, who was near her:

"Don't you think Madame Martin wonderfully beautiful this year?"

In the *foyer* sparkling with light and gold, General de La Briche asked Larivière:

"Have you seen my nephew?"

"Your nephew? Le Ménil?"

"Yes, Robert. He was in the house just now."

La Briche thought for a moment. Then:

"He came to Sémanville this summer. I thought him strange, absent-minded. A nice fellow, perfectly frank and intelligent. But he ought to have a career, an object in life."

It was a moment since the bell announcing the rise of the curtain had stopped ringing. The two old men were passing through the deserted *foyer*.

"An object in life," repeated La Briche, tall, thin, and bent, while his comrade, brisk and active, left him behind and reached the theatre door.

Marguerite was spinning and singing in the wood. When she had finished, Miss Bell said to Madame Martin:

"Oh! darling, M. Choulette has written me a perfectly beautiful letter. He told me that he was

very famous. And I was delighted to hear it. And he added: 'The fame of other poets rests upon spices and myrrh. Mine bleeds and groans beneath a shower of stones and oyster-shells.' Is it really true, my love, that good M. Choulette is being stoned by his fellow countrymen?"

While Thérèse was reassuring Miss Bell, Loyer came into the box with an imperious and blustering air.

He was wet and muddy.

"I have just come from the Elysée," he said.

He had the politeness to announce the good news to Madame Martin first.

"The appointments are ratified. Your husband is Minister of Finance. It is a fine office."

"Did the President of the Republic make no objection when my name was brought before him?" asked M. Martin-Bellème.

"None. Berthier reminded him of the hereditary uprightness of the Martins, of your wealth, and especially of your connection with certain personages in the financial world, where support may be useful to the government. And, to employ Garain's happy expression, the President realised the needs of the hour. He confirmed the appointment."

Count Martin's sallow face wrinkled slightly. He smiled.

"The official announcement," resumed Loyer, "will appear in *L'Official* to-morrow. I drove in a cab with the government clerk who was taking it to the editor's office. It was a necessary precaution. In the days of Grévy, who was by no means a fool, official decrees have been intercepted on their way from the Elysée to the Quai Voltaire."

And Loyer threw himself into a chair. There,

while admiring Madame Martin's shoulders, he continued:

"It can no longer be said, as in the days of my poor friend Gambetta, that the Republic has no women. You, Madame, will entertain royally in the ministerial halls."

Marguerite, wearing her necklace and her earrings, was looking in the glass and singing the jewel song.

"We must draw up our manifesto," said Count Martin. "I have already been thinking of it. With regard to my own department I think I have discovered an excellent programme: The debt to be paid off from the surplus. No new taxation."

Loyer shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear Martin, there is no reason for making any radical change in the programme of the last cabinet; the situation remains essentially the same."

An idea suddenly struck him.

"The deuce! I had forgotten. We have sent your old friend Larivière to the War Office, without consulting him. I was commissioned to tell him the news."

He thought he might find him in a café on the boulevards frequented by officers. But Count Martin said he was in the house.

"We must get hold of him," said Loyer.

Bowing to Madame Martin:

"Will you permit me to carry off your husband, Countess?"

They had just gone out when Jacques Dechartre and Paul Vence came into the box.

"I congratulate you, Madame," said Paul Vence.

But she turned to Dechartre.

"I hope you have not come to congratulate me . . .?"

Paul Vence asked if they would live in the ministerial residence.

"Not for anything."

"But at any rate, Madame," resumed Paul Vence, "you will go to the balls at the Elysée and the Government Offices; and we shall admire the art with which you will preserve your mysterious charm, and continue the subject of our dreams."

"Ministerial changes seem to inspire you with very frivolous reflections, Monsieur Vence," said Madame Martin.

"Madame," he replied, "I will not say with Renan, my beloved master: 'What does that matter to Sirius?' because you would rightly reply: 'What has big Sirius to do with the little Earth?' But it always surprises me somewhat to see the mature and even the aged led astray by the illusion of power, forgetting that hunger, love, death, all the mean, as well as the sublime necessities of life, exercise so imperious a control over the mass of mankind that those who rule over their bodies are left with nothing more than power on paper and empire in words. And what is more wonderful still—the people believe that they have other rulers than their poverty, their desire, and their imbecility. He was a wise man who said: 'Let us appoint Irony and Pity to be the witnesses and judges of mankind.' "

"But, Monsieur Vence," laughed Madame Martin, "you wrote that yourself—I read your books."

Meanwhile in the theatre and the passages, the two ministers were looking in vain for the General. Through the group of box-keepers, they went be-

hind the stage, and past the stage scenery, which was being put up and taken down, through the crowd of young German girls in red petticoats, sorcerers, demons, ancient courtesans, they came into the *foyer* of the ballet. The vast room, painted with allegorical figures, almost deserted, had that air of gravity arising from State ownership and the endowment of wealth. There were two dancers standing mournfully, with one foot on the bar running along the wall. Here and there men in black coats and women in short full skirts were standing in groups, in almost perfect silence.

As they entered, Loyer and Martin-Bellème took off their hats. Across the room they saw Larivière with a pretty girl, whose pink tunic with a gold belt was slit up the sides over her tights.

She was holding in her hand a piece of cardboard covered with gilt paper. As they approached, they heard her saying to the General:

"You are old, but I am sure you go in for it as much as he does."

And with her bare arm she pointed disdainfully to a young man, with a gardenia in his button-hole, standing near them and grinning. Loyer signed to the General that he wanted to speak to him; and, pushing him against the bar, said:

"I have pleasure in announcing your appointment as Minister of War."

Larivière, incredulous, did not reply. This badly dressed man, with long hair, who in his long dusty coat looked like some shouting juggler, inspired him with such mistrust that he suspected a trap, perhaps a practical joke.

"Monsieur Loyer, Keeper of the Seals," said Count Martin.

Loyer insisted:

"General, you cannot refuse. I have answered for your acceptance. If you hesitate you will promote the undesirable return of Garain. He is a traitor."

"My dear colleague, you exaggerate," said Count Martin. "But perhaps Garain lacks frankness. And the General's support is imperative."

"Our country before everything," replied Larivière, bubbling over with excitement.

"You know, General," resumed Loyer: "existing laws administered with inflexible moderation. Stand to that principle."

His eyes were fixed on the two ballet girls stretching their short muscular legs over the bar.

Larivière was murmuring:

"The *morale* of the army excellent. . . . The disinterestedness of the commanders rising to the most critical situations."

Loyer tapped him on the shoulder:

"My dear colleague, large armies are good after all."

"I agree with you," replied Larivière, "the present army is sufficient for the highest requirements of national defence."

"The best of big armies," resumed Loyer, "is that they render war impossible. It would be mad to engage in war with a force so gigantic that it baffles every human attempt to direct it. Don't you agree, General?"

General Larivière winked:

"The present situation demands great prudence," he said "We have to deal with unusual and menacing circumstances."

Then Loyer, looking at his military colleague with a certain mild cynicism and scorn:

"In the very improbable case of war, don't you think, my dear colleague, that the real generals would be the station-masters?"

The three ministers went out, down the stage staircase. The President of the Council was expecting them at his house.

The last act was beginning. Only Dechartre and Miss Bell were with Madame Martin in her box.

Miss Bell was saying:

"Darling, I am delighted—how do you say it in French?—*je suis exaltée*, to think that you wear the red lily of Florence on your heart. And M. Dechartre, who has an artist's soul, must be very pleased to see those dear jewels on your dress. Oh! how I should like to know what jeweller made it. That lily is as graceful and supple as an iris. Yes, it is exquisite, magnificent and cruel. Have you ever noticed, my love, that beautiful jewels have always an air of magnificent cruelty?"

"My jeweller," said Thérèse, "is here, and you have named him: M. Dechartre was kind enough to design this ornament."

The box door opened. Thérèse half turned and saw Le Ménil in the shadow bowing to her with his stiff grace:

"Will you convey my congratulations to your husband, Madame?"

Rather dryly he complimented her on looking well. To Miss Bell he addressed a few pleasant, conventional remarks.

Thérèse was listening anxiously, with her mouth half open in the painful effort to make insignificant replies.

He asked her if she had had a good time at Joinville. He would like to have been there for the hunting. But he could not arrange it. He had been yachting in the Mediterranean and later hunting at Sémanville.

"Oh! Monsieur Le Ménil," said Miss Bell, "did you wander over the blue sea? And did you meet any sirens?"

No, he had not seen any sirens; but for three days a dolphin had accompanied the yacht.

Miss Bell asked whether the dolphin liked music.

He did not think so.

"Dolphins," he said, "are simply spermaceti-whales that sailors call ocean geese because of a certain goose-like formation of the head."

But Miss Bell refused to believe that the monster that bore Arion to Cape Tenarus had the head of a goose.

"Next year, Monsieur Le Ménil, if you find a dolphin swimming round your yacht, I entreat you to play to him on your flute the hymn to the Delphic Apollo. Do you like the sea, Monsieur Le Ménil?"

"I prefer the woods."

He spoke simply and calmly, quite self-contained.

"Yes, Monsieur Le Ménil, I know how you love the woods and the thickets where leverets dance in the moonlight."

Dechartre turned pale; he rose and went out.

It was the church scene—Marguerite on her knees, was wringing her hands, her head bowed beneath the heavy weight of her long fair plaits. And there resounded from the organ and the chorus the chant of the dead:

His Cross in Heaven on that dread day
Obscures the sun's diminished ray,
Chaos resumes its ancient sway.*

"Do you know, darling, that the chant of the dead sung in Catholic churches comes from a Franciscan hermitage? It suggests the wind in winter blowing through the larches on the heights of Alvernia."

Thérèse did not hear. Her soul had flown away through the door of the box.

In the ante-chamber there was a sound of chairs being overturned. Schmoll came back. He had heard that M. Martin-Bellème had been appointed minister. And immediately he came to demand his Commander's Cross and a larger flat at the Institute. At present his rooms were dark and small, not nearly large enough for his wife and his five daughters. The only place for his study was a loft. He complained at length and refused to depart until Madame Martin promised to speak for him.

"Monsieur Le Ménil," asked Miss Bell, "shall you go yachting next year?"

Le Ménil thought not. He had no intention of keeping the *Rosebud*. The sea was depressing.

And calmly and determinedly he looked at Thérèse.

On the stage, in Marguerite's prison, Mephistopheles was singing: "The day has dawned," and the orchestra was imitating the terrible gallop of the horses. Thérèse murmured:

"I have a headache. It is very close in here."

* Quand du Seigneur le jour luira,
Sa croix au ciel resplendira,
Et l'univers s'écroulera.

Marguerite's clear words, calling to the angels, were wafted on the air.

"Darling, I must tell you that poor Marguerite will not be saved according to the flesh, and for that very reason she is saved in spirit and in truth. One thing I believe, darling, that we shall all be saved. Yes, I believe in the ultimate purification of sinners."

Thérèse rose, tall, and dazzlingly white in contrast to the blood-red flower on her breast. Miss Bell enthralled was listening to the music. Le Ménil, in the ante-room, took Madame Martin's cloak. And while he held it unfolded, she passed from the box into the ante-room, and paused before the mirror, near the half open door. On to her bare shoulders, touching them lightly with his fingers, he put the great cloak of red velvet embroidered with gold and lined with ermine, and said in a low voice, very briefly and very distinctly:

"Thérèse, I love you. Remember what I asked you the day before yesterday. Every day, every day, after three o'clock I shall be in our flat, Rue Spontini."

At that moment, as she bent her head for him to put on her cloak, she saw Dechartre, with his hand on the door-handle. He looked at her with all the reproach and sorrow the human eye is capable of expressing. Then he turned away down the corridor. It was as if hammers of fire were beating on the walls of her heart, and she remained motionless on the threshold.

"You were waiting for me?" said Montessuy, who had come to fetch her. "You are quite forsaken to-day; I will take you and Miss Bell home."

XXXIII

IN her carriage, in her room, her lover's cruel sorrowful look haunted her. She knew how apt he was to fall into despair, how quick to lose command of his will. In that mood she had seen him hastening along the Arno bank. In his sadness and anguish it had been her happiness then to run to him and say: "Come." And now again, surrounded and observed as she was, she ought to have found something to say to him, and not to have let him go away in silence and suffering. But she had been taken by surprise and overwhelmed. The absurd incident had passed so rapidly! She felt for Le Ménil that impulsive anger we feel for things that hurt us, the stone against which we bruise our heads. It was herself whom she reproached bitterly for having allowed her lover to go, without one word, without one glance, into which she might have put her whole soul.

While Pauline was waiting to undress her, she walked up and down impatiently. Then she stopped abruptly. In the dark mirrors, in which the candles were reflected, she saw the corridor at the theatre and her lover hastening down it, without looking back.

Where was he now? What was he saying to

himself alone? It was torture not to be able to go to him immediately.

For a long while she pressed her hands against her heart; for she felt as if she were choking.

Pauline uttered a little cry. On her mistress's white bodice she saw drops of blood. Without her noticing it, the stamens of the red lily had scratched her hand.

She took off the emblem, which she had worn, openly declaring the secret of her heart, and, holding it in her hand, she gazed at it long. Then once again she saw the Florence days, the cell at San Marco where her lover's kiss fell sweetly on her lips, while through the lashes of her cast down eyelids she saw vaguely the angels and the blue sky painted on the wall, the Lanzi, and the glittering fountain of the ice vendor on the red cotton table-cloth; the little house in the Via Alfieri, its nymphs, its goats, and the room, where the shepherds and the masks on the screens listened to her voice breaking the long silence.

All this was no shadow of the past, no phantom of former days. It was the present reality of her love. And one stupid word uttered by a stranger had shattered these beautiful things. Fortunately it was impossible. Her love, her lover were not dependent on such a trifle. If only she could go to him, as she was, half-undressed, by night, and enter his room. . . . She would find him sitting by the fire, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands, sad. Then, with her fingers in his hair, she would make him look up and see that she loved him, that she was his, his living treasure of joy and love.

She had sent her maid away. In bed, with her lamp lit, she was pondering over one thought.

It was coincidence, an absurd coincidence. He would understand that nothing so stupid could affect their love. What madness! for him to be jealous of another! As if there were for her any other men in the world!

M. Martin-Bellème opened the door of his room. Seeing a light, he came in.

"Aren't you asleep, Thérèse?"

He had just come from conferring with Berthier d'Eyzelles and his colleagues. On certain matters he wanted advice from his wife, for he knew she was clever. Above all things he wanted sincerity.

"It is done," he said. "You, my love, will help me, I am sure, in a position greatly desired, but very difficult and even dangerous. I owe it partly to you, for it is largely your father's powerful influence that has placed me in it."

He consulted her as to who should be the leader of the cabinet.

She gave him the best advice she could. She found him sensible, calm, and not more foolish than the others.

He indulged in reflections:

"In the Senate I must support the budget as it has been voted by the Chamber. This budget includes innovations of which I did not approve. As a deputy I opposed them. As a minister I shall support them. Then I looked at things from the outside. Seen from within they are quite different. Besides, I am no longer free."

He sighed.

"Ah! if people only knew how little one can do when one is in power."

He gave her his impressions. Berthier was hold-

ing back. The others were inscrutable. Loyer alone appeared extremely autocratic.

She heard him patiently, but without paying attention. That pale face and thin voice were to her a timepiece marking the slow passing of the minutes one by one.

"Now and then Loyer gives utterance to the most extraordinary opinions. At the same time that he declares himself a firm supporter of the Concordat, he says: 'The bishops are the *préfets* of religion. I shall protect them because they belong to me. And through them I shall control the spiritual gamekeepers—the parish priests.' "

He reminded her that she would have to move in a circle not her own, which would doubtless shock her by its vulgarity. But their position would require them to slight no one. Besides, he counted on her tact and her loyalty.

She looked at him, rather alarmed.

"Nothing is urgent at present, my love. We shall see later."

He was tired and overdone. He wished her good-night and advised her to sleep. She would ruin her health if she read like that all night. He left her.

She heard the sound of his footsteps, rather heavier than usual, while he was crossing the study heaped up with blue-books and newspapers, on his way to the bedroom, where he would sleep, perhaps. Then the silence of the night oppressed her. She looked at her watch. It was half-past one.

She said to herself: "He also is suffering. . . . He looked at me with such anger and despair."

She had lost none of her courage nor her ardour.

What made her desperate was to be there, a prisoner, as if in solitary confinement. She would be free when day dawned; then she would go to him, see him, and explain all. It was so simple. In the sad monotony of her thoughts, she listened to the rolling of carts, at long intervals, on the quay. This sound, which marked the flight of the hours, arrested her attention, almost interested her. She made an effort to catch the faint noise in the distance, growing more and more distinct until she could distinguish the rolling of the wheels, the grinding of the axle-trees, the clashing of hoofs, growing feebler and feebler, and dying away into an imperceptible murmur.

And, when silence was restored, she returned to her thoughts.

He would understand that she loved him, that she had never loved any one else. But it was distressing that the night was so long in passing away. She dared not look at her watch, for fear of perceiving the terrible slowness of the hours.

She rose, went to the window, and drew aside the curtains. There was a pale light in the cloudy sky. She thought it must be the beginning of day-break. She looked at her watch. It was half-past three.

She went back to the window. The infinite darkness outside attracted her. She looked. The pavement shone under the gas-lamps. An invisible, silent rain was falling from the dull sky. Suddenly a voice came out of the silence; high and then low, so staccato that it seemed several voices replying to each other. It was a drunkard loafing on the pavement and knocking up against the trees. He was engaged in a long argument with the creatures

of his dreams, magnanimously allowing them to speak, only to overwhelm them afterwards by wild gestures and imperious speech. Thérèse watched the poor man swaying along the parapet, in his white blouse, like a rag in the night wind, and now and again she heard the words, constantly recurring: "That is what I say to the government."

Numb with cold, she went back to bed. An agonising thought came into her mind. "He is jealous, madly jealous. It is a physical matter, one of nerves. But his love also is physical and of the nerves. His love and his jealousy are the same thing. Another would understand. It would be enough to appeal to his self-respect." She knew that in him jealousy was physical torture, an open wound, extended by the powers of imagination. She knew how deep-rooted was the evil. She had seen him turn pale in front of the bronze St. Mark, when she posted her letter in the wall of the old Florentine house; and then she was only his in his desire and his dreams.

Later, after their long kisses, she recalled his half-stifled complaints, his sudden sadness, and the sorrowful mystery of the words he was always repeating: "You alone can help me to forget you." She beheld the letter received at Dinard and his wild despair over a few words heard in a café. She felt that the chance blow had fallen on the sensitive spot, on the open wound. But she did not lose heart. She would say everything, confess everything, and all her avowals would proclaim: "I love you. I have never loved another." She had never deceived him. She would tell him nothing that he had not guessed already. She had lied so little, as little as possible,

and merely to avoid giving him pain. How could he fail to understand? It would be best that he should know all, since that all amounted to nothing. Over and over again she thought the same thoughts and said to herself the same words.

Her lamp was going out. She lit candles. It was half-past six. She realised that she had slept. She ran to the window. The sky was black, and touching the earth seemed to form one chaos of thick darkness. Then she became curious as to what hour the sun would rise. She had no idea. All she knew was that the nights were very long in December. She tried to remember, but could not. She never thought of looking at the open calendar on the table. The heavy footsteps of workmen passing in groups, the noise of the milk carts and the vegetable waggons sounded like good omens to her ears. She shuddered at these first signs of the town's awakening.

XXXIV

AT nine o'clock, in the courtyard of the little house, she found M. Fusellier sweeping away the rain-water, with his pipe in his mouth. Madame Fusellier came out of her lodge. They both looked embarrassed. Madame Fusellier was the first to speak:

"M. Jacques is not at home."

And, as Thérèse was silent and did not move, Fusellier came up to her, broom in hand, hiding his pipe behind his back.

"M. Jacques has not come home yet."

"I will wait for him," said Thérèse.

Madame Fusellier showed her into the drawing-room, where she lit the fire. And because the wood only smoked and refused to burst into a flame, she stayed bending over it, her hands on her hips.

"It is the rain," she said, "that makes the smoke come down the chimney."

Madame Martin told her not to trouble to light a fire, she was not cold.

She saw herself in a mirror. Her face was white, except for her cheeks which were burning. And then only she became aware that her feet were as cold as ice. She went up to the fire. Madame Fusellier, seeing that she was anxious, tried to say something comforting:

"M. Jacques won't be long—wouldn't Madame like to warm herself while she is waiting?"

The rain was pattering on the glazed ceiling and the light was dull. On the walls, the lady with the unicorn, stiff and of deathly hue, seemed no longer beautiful among her cavaliers, in the forest full of birds and flowers. Thérèse was muttering to herself the words:

"He has not come home." As she repeated them over and over again, they seemed to lose their meaning. With burning eyes she looked at the door.

She remained thus without moving, without thinking, how long she didn't know; perhaps it was half an hour. Then there was a sound of footsteps; the door opened. He entered. She saw that he was wet through, and muddy, and burning with fever.

She looked at him so sincerely and so frankly that he was astonished. But, almost immediately all his anguish welled up within him.

"What do you want of me now?" he said. "You have done me all the harm in your power."

His fatigue made him seem gentle. She was alarmed.

"Jacques, listen to me . . ."

He signified that there was nothing more to be said.

"Jacques, listen. I have not deceived you. Oh! no I have not deceived you. Could it have been possible? Could it . . ."

He interrupted:

"Have pity on me. Don't hurt me any more. Leave me, I entreat of you. If you knew what a night I have passed, you would not dare to torture me further."

He sank on to the divan, where, six months ago, he had kissed her under her veil.

All night he had walked without thinking of where he was going. He had followed the Seine, until he found its banks fringed with willows and poplars. To still his suffering he had tried to distract his mind. On the Quai de Bercy he had watched the moon fleeting among the clouds. For an hour he had seen her hidden and then reappearing. Then he had set himself with minute accuracy to count the windows of houses. It had begun to rain. He had gone to the Market, and drunk brandy in a tavern. A big woman, who squinted, had said to him: "You don't look happy." He sank down on a leather covered bench. And for a moment he was at rest.

The visions of that terrible night passed before him. He said: "I thought of that night on the bank of the Arno. You have robbed me of all beauty and all joy."

He besought her to leave him alone. In his weariness he pitied himself profoundly. He would have liked to sleep, not to die: death always filled him with horror. But to sleep and never wake. Meanwhile he saw her before him, ardently desired, and as desirable as before, with her face worn by suffering and in spite of the fixity of her fevered gaze. And inscrutable now, more mysterious than ever. He looked at her. His hatred revived with his anguish. With an evil glance, he sought signs of caresses that he had not given her.

She held out her arms to him:

"Listen, Jacques."

He showed that it was useless for her to speak. Nevertheless he wanted to hear her, and already

he was listening eagerly. What she was going to say, he hated and rejected beforehand, but it was the only thing in the world that interested him. She said:

"You dared to believe that I betrayed you, that I did not live in and for you alone. But don't you understand? Don't you realise that if that man had been my lover he would not have needed to speak to me in the theatre, in that box; he would have had a thousand other opportunities of arranging a *rendezvous*. Oh! no, my love, I assure you that since I have had the happiness—and even to-day in agony and sorrow, I still say happiness—of knowing you, I have been yours alone. Could I possibly have been another's? It is monstrous to imagine it. But I love you, I love you. It is you alone that I love. I have never loved another."

He replied slowly, with cruel deliberation:

"'Every day I shall be in our flat, Rue Spontini, after three o'clock.' It was no lover, not your lover who spoke those words! No! It was a stranger."

She rose, and with sad seriousness:

"Yes, I have been his mistress. You knew it. I denied it, I lied, so as not to give you pain, not to irritate you. I saw how anxious and suspicious you were. But I lied so little and so badly! You knew it. Don't reproach me with it. You knew it, you often spoke of the past, and then one day at a restaurant you heard. . . . And your imagination went beyond the truth. I did not deceive you when I lied. And if you knew how little it counts in my life! And besides, I did not know you. I did not dream that I should ever know you. I was so weary of my life."

She threw herself on her knees:

"I was wrong. I ought to have waited for you. But, if you only knew how all that is as if it had never been, and it was so very little."

And in a sweet, singing voice, she said over and over again like a refrain:

"Why did you not come before? Why?"

She crept to him, tried to take his hands and clasp his knees. He repulsed her:

"I was stupid. I did not believe, I did not know. I was resolved not to know."

He rose, and, in an outburst of hatred:

"I could not bear it, no I could not bear it to be that one."

She sat down on the divan that he had quitted; and then plaintively, speaking low, she explained the past. She had been cast all alone into a horribly commonplace society. Then it had happened, she had yielded. But immediately she had regretted it. Oh! if he knew how dull and sad her life had been, he would not be jealous, he would pity her.

She shook her head, and, looking at him through her disordered hair:

"But I am talking of another woman. I have nothing in common with that woman. I have existed only since I knew you, since I was yours."

He had begun to pace wildly up and down the room, just as a short time before he had walked on the banks of the Seine. He burst into a bitter laugh:

"Yes, but while you were loving me, what about the other woman, who was not you?"

She looked at him indignantly:

"Can you believe . . .?"

"Didn't you see him at Florence, didn't you go with him to the station?"

She told him that he had sought her in Italy, that she had met him and parted from him, that he had gone away in anger, and that since he had tried to persuade her to come back to him, but that she had not even thought about it.

"My love, I see none, I know none but you."

He shook his head.

"I do not believe you."

She grew angry.

"I have told you everything. Accuse me, condemn me, but don't insult my love for you. That I forbid."

He shook his head.

"Leave me. You have hurt me too much. I loved you so dearly that any sorrow you might have caused me, I would have accepted and kept and loved; but this is hideous. I hate it. Leave me. My grief is too deep. Good-bye."

Standing firmly, her little feet planted on the carpet:

"I came. It is for my happiness, my life that I am contending. I am resolute, you know. I will not go."

And she repeated all she had said. Emphatic and sincere, convinced that she was in the right, she explained how she had broken the already slackened tie that chafed her. She told how from the day when she had yielded to him in the little house in the Via Alfieri, she had been his entirely, without a regret, certainly without a glance or a thought for any one else. But when she spoke of another, she angered him. And he cried:

"I don't believe you."

Then she began again to repeat what she had said.

And suddenly, instinctively she looked at her watch:

"Good heavens! it is twelve o'clock."

Many a time she had uttered the same cry of alarm when the hour for parting had surprised them. And Jacques trembled when he heard those familiar words now so sorrowful and despairing. For a few minutes longer she implored him with tears and passionate words. Then she was obliged to go; she had gained nothing.

At home she found market-women waiting in the hall to present her with a bouquet. She remembered that her husband was minister. There were piles of telegrams, cards, letters, congratulations, requests. Madame Marmet wrote asking her to recommend her nephew to General Larivière.

She went into the dining-room, and sank exhausted on to a divan. M. Martin-Bellème was finishing his lunch. He was due at once at a cabinet council and at the house of the retiring Minister of Finance, on whom he had to call. The discreet obsequiousness of his staff had already flattered, wearied, and perturbed him.

"Don't forget, my love," he said, "to call on Madame Berthier d'Eyzelles. You know how sensitive she is."

She made no reply. While he was dipping his withered fingers in a finger-glass, he looked up, and, seeing her tired look and her disordered dress, he did not dare to say another word.

He found himself face to face with a mystery he was determined to ignore, a secret sorrow which one word might disclose. It filled him with anxiety, fear, and a kind of respect.

He threw down his serviette.

"Excuse me, my dear."

And he went out.

She tried to eat. She could swallow nothing. For everything she felt an uncontrollable loathing.

About two o'clock she went back to the little house at Les Ternes. She found Jacques in his room. He was smoking his wooden pipe. A cup of coffee nearly empty was on the table. He looked at her with a hardness that froze the blood in her veins. She did not dare to speak, feeling that all she might say would offend and irritate him, and that her mere appearance discreet and silent rekindled his wrath. He knew that she would come back; he had expected her with the impatience of hatred, with an eagerness as keen as when he waited for her in the house in the Via Alfieri. She saw in a flash that she had been unwise in coming; absent he would have desired her, longed for her, summoned her perhaps. But it was too late; and besides, being prudent had not occurred to her.

She said to him:

"You see, I came back; I could not do otherwise. And it was quite natural, since I love you. You know it."

She had felt that everything she could say would only irritate him. He asked her if she said as much in the Rue Spontini.

She looked at him profoundly sad.

"Jacques, you have often said that deep down in your heart was a world of hatred and anger, which might break forth against me. I see you like to make me suffer."

With loving patience, she retold at length the story of her life, the emptiness and sadness of the

past, and how, since he had made her his, she had lived only in him and through him.

Her words were as sincere as her glance. She was sitting near him. From time to time he felt the now timid touch of her fingers and the warmth of her fevered breath. He listened with a cruel interest. Hard on himself, he wanted to know everything: her latest meeting with Le Ménil, and the story of their final rupture. She told him faithfully all that had happened at the Hôtel de la Grande Bretagne; but she represented it as having taken place in a walk in the Cascine, for fear lest the thought of their sad interview in a private room should still further anger her lover. Then she explained the meeting at the station. She had not wished to drive to desperation a sad passionate man. Since then she had heard nothing of him till the day when he spoke to her in the Avenue MacMahon. She repeated what he had said under the Judas-tree. Two days later she had seen him in her box at the opera. She had certainly not invited him to come. That was the truth.

It was the truth. But the old poison slowly accumulated was working. The past, the irreparable past had been called into the present by her confession. He saw it and it tortured him.

"I don't believe you," he said. And he added:

"And if I did believe you, the very thought that you had been the mistress of that man would make it impossible for me ever to see you again. I told you so, I wrote it to you—you remember, when you were at Dinard. I could not bear it to be he. And since . . ."

He paused. She said:

"You know there has been nothing since."

He resumed with sullen passion:

"Since, I have seen him."

Long they remained silent. At length, in a surprised and plaintive tone she said:

"But my love, you should have thought that a woman like me, married as I was. . . . Every day women come to their lovers with a more serious past than mine, and are loved nevertheless. Ah! if you only knew how little my past counts for in my life."

"I know what you can be. One cannot forgive in you what one would overlook in another."

"But, my love, I am like other women."

"No, you are not like the others. In you nothing can be overlooked."

He spoke with compressed mouth and look of hatred. His eyes, those eyes that she had seen so big, so sparkling with the gentle fire of love, now hard and dry, sunken behind their wrinkled lids, made him look quite different. He frightened her.

She went to the opposite end of the room. Seated there, with her heart in her throat, her eyes wide open with astonishment, like a child, she stayed long, trembling and stifling her sobs. Then she burst out crying.

"Why did I ever know you?" he sighed.

Through her tears, she answered:

"I do not regret having known you. It is killing me, and I do not regret it. I have loved."

He cruelly persisted in making her suffer. He knew how badly he was acting and yet could not help himself.

"It is possible that after all you may have loved me too."

With a slight bitterness, she replied:

"But I loved you only. I loved you too well. That is what you are punishing me for now. . . . Oh! how can you think that I ever was to another what I have been to you!"

"Why not?"

She looked at him without strength or courage:

"Tell me, is it true that you don't believe me?"

She added very softly:

"If I were to kill myself, would you believe me?"

"No, I should not believe you."

She wiped her face with her handkerchief, then looking up, her eyes sparkling through her tears:

"Then, it is all over."

She rose, looked round the room at the thousand things with which she had lived in joyful, voluptuous intimacy, that she had made her own, and that now suddenly were nothing to her; they regarded her as a stranger and an enemy; she looked at the nude woman, who was making that gesture in flight that had not been explained to her; the Florentine medals recalling Fiesole and the enchanted hours in Italy; Dechartre's study of the profile of a street girl with a laugh on her thin worn pretty face. She paused for a moment, she stood in front of it, sympathising with that little newspaper-seller, who had also come there and disappeared, carried into the terrible immensity of life and things.

She repeated:

"Then it is over."

He was silent.

Their forms were growing indistinct in the twilight.

She said:

"What is to become of me?"

He replied:

"And what will become of me?"

They looked pitifully at each other, because each was filled with self pity.

Thérèse continued:

"And I who used to fear growing old, for your sake and mine, lest our beautiful love might utterly die! It would have been better had it never been born. Yes, it would have been better had I never been born. Was it not an omen when as a child, under the lime-trees at Joinville, near the Crown, in front of the marble nymphs, I longed to die?"

With arms hanging down and hands clasped, she looked up; through her tears, her eyes sparkled in the gloom.

"Is there no way of making you feel that what I tell you is true, that never, since I was yours, never . . . But how could I? The very idea seems to me horrible, absurd! Can you know me so little?"

He shook his head sadly.

"I don't know you."

Once again she looked round questioningly at all the things in the room that had witnessed their love.

"But then, all that we have been to each other . . . it was in vain, it was useless. We have merely met, we have not become one."

She grew indignant. It was impossible for him not to realise what he was to her.

And in the passion of her rejected love, she threw herself into his arms and covered him with tears and kisses.

He forgot everything, took her, aching, broken,

but happy, and pressed her in his arms with the mournful rage of desire. Already her head thrown back on the pillow, she was smiling through her tears. Suddenly he tore himself away from her.

"I no longer see you alone. The other is always with you."

Silent, indignant, despairing, she looked at him. She rose, arranged her dress and her hair, with a feeling of shame that was new to her. Then, realising that the end had come, she looked around her in astonishment, with eyes that saw nothing, and went out slowly.